Perfect Match

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/22779370.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Beverly Katz, Brian Zeller, Jimmy Price, Abigail Hobbs, Jack Crawford, Alana Bloom, Bedelia Du Maurier, Freddie Lounds, Dr. Frederick Chilton, Bella Crawford
Additional Tags:	Friends to Lovers, Online Dating, Falling In Love, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Social Anxiety, Tooth-Rotting Fluff, Courtship, Smut, Will finds out (eventually), Background Bev/Zeller, Set in Season 1, Jealous Hannibal Lecter, Possessive Behavior, Post-Episode: s01e08 Fromage, Light Dom/sub, Orgasm Delay, Choking, Angst, Happy Ending, Canon-Typical Violence, Murder Family, Top Hannibal Lecter, Bottom Will Graham, Top Will Graham, Bottom Hannibal Lecter
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Perfect Match, Part 1 of Earthsickwithoutyou's Bottom Hannibal Collection 🍑🥰
Collections:	Wendigo & Stag
Stats:	Published: 2020-02-18 Completed: 2020-05-02 Words: 71,371 Chapters: 24/24

Perfect Match

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

When Beverly helps Will set up a dating app profile, he's highly cynical it will ever lead to the kind of happy romantic relationship he craves. But everything changes the night he comes across Hannibal's profile...

Chapter 1

“Ooh, are there chocolate chips in that?” Beverly asked, noticing the granola bar in Will’s hand.

They were having lunch together in the FBI Academy cafeteria, which was thankfully quiet. Will had been fighting a bad headache all day, and was currently hoping it was a blood sugar thing. Maybe food would solve what aspirin hadn’t.

“Hmm?” He glanced down at the wrapper and shrugged. “Yeah, I guess so. Do you want it?”

He was only aware of hunger as a craving his body transmitted every few hours, disconnected from his intellectual and emotional chaos so that he found it hard to care. He appreciated his homemade fish dinners because of their underlying sense of accomplishment: he ate what he caught, and the meal was an extension of the serenity he found in his favorite hobby.

Will also liked it when Hannibal made a meal for him, because of the way Hannibal’s face lit up if Will complimented his cooking. Or because of the way Hannibal proudly explained every ingredient and every historical, cultural tradition associated with a given recipe. Upon reflection, he supposed Hannibal was really fucking cute sometimes, and he blushed, wrenching his thoughts back to Beverly’s expectant face.

“I’ll trade you,” she proposed playfully, gesturing with a tub of yogurt. “This is fruit-on-the-bottom.”

He didn’t care about the granola bar. He’d just as soon eat it as any other snack that would keep him from fainting between now and when he finally, blessedly, got to go home and rest (for now, he’d allow himself the absurd fantasy that he actually *would* get even a single iota of rest or peace).

“Okay,” he laughed, passing her the granola bar and taking the yogurt, opening it to dip the plastic spoon in, realizing this is what it must be like for kids, when they have friends at school. He honestly wouldn’t know, it was just an educated guess.

Even in the midst of the weird fog that seemed to impose itself over his thinking more every day, getting worse when he had to burden his troubled mind with the perspectives of serial killers, he felt the importance of kindness and decency, maybe because they were so rare. Beverly wasn’t condescending and she didn’t want anything from Will except friendship, if he happened to want that, too.

He could only think of one other person who treated him like that...Hannibal...but he was trying *not* to dwell too much on thoughts of his sort-of-therapist, sort-of-friend. Hannibal bestowed upon him a natural, specific tenderness that seemed to keep confusing Will in ways he was afraid to fully understand.

“Oh, *chocolate*,” Beverly sighed happily, but her face fell when her phone chimed and she flicked the screen open with a disapproving sneer. “Oh, come on. This again?”

“What is it?” he asked, “Unless it’s personal, sorry, I don’t mean to pry.”

“Pry away,” she shrugged, “I’m sure you can relate.” She showed him her phone screen, which displayed a bright yellow app with annoying cartoon pictures of bees on it. There was a chat between Beverly and a man named Mike, and Will quickly intuited that Beverly had been carrying on a pleasant, fairly detailed bit of small talk describing her day, while Mike kept giving bland, one-word answers.

“Ever feel like you’re just going to delete these dating apps and resign yourself to being single forever if that’s the alternative to chatting with the *Mikes* of the world?” She rolled her eyes as Will’s brow furrowed.

“That’s a dating app?” He’d actually never even seen one in action.

“Will Graham,” Beverly’s jaw dropped and her eyes flashed in fascinated astonishment. “Are you telling me you don’t use them? I just assumed everyone did.”

“I don’t really date,” he explained, eating his yogurt since that was definitely easier than explaining the fact in more detail.

He honestly didn’t know what his hesitation was. After all, his loneliness seemed to be a second person in the room with him every night at home, a mean-spirited shadow spreading over his cozy house and sucking the joy out of his otherwise comforting routines. Will tried to assuage the feeling by spending time with his dogs, but then he kept wishing someone else was there to laugh with him about their quirky, adorable antics. He tried to lose himself in a book or a movie, blunt the edges with a bit of whiskey before bed, or even the occasional, overly self-conscious try at masturbation, but nothing was good enough.

“Well, are you interested in finding someone?” She asked mildly, judgement free.

God, some part of him *did* want to. He thought about what it would be like for someone deeply attractive to touch him intimately and shivered. He imagined dinner-and-a-movie dates or even spending holidays with a significant other and frowned. Who the hell would want to let themselves in for all the inevitable complications of dating Will Graham, publicly known “insane” criminal profiler, awkward in almost every way? He was a mess, a mess no one would want when there were plenty of accomplished, polished, stable people out there. Just look at what had happened with Alana. She didn’t want to date him because he was basically a specimen, a psychological oddity combining genius with dangerous unpredictability. Not exactly anyone’s idea of a sexy dreamboat.

“Maybe?” he ventured, licking a small fleck of strawberry from his upper lip. “I try not to wonder about it too much. I’m not sure who would really want to date someone like me,” he said with a complicated chuckle.

Beverly looked as if she noticed the pain in his laugh and she shook her head with a soft smile. “I think that if you were on this app for five minutes, you’d be cleaning up. Have you

seen yourself, first of all? I mean this platonically on my end, but you're gorgeous. Like, objectively gorgeous."

Will blushed and ducked his head, scratching his neck. "Nah. I can't control this hair at all," he ruffled it as evidence, sending his tousled curls into yet more disarray. "Don't know how to put an outfit together that looks halfway decent. I'm alright, I guess, but that's about it."

"Are you for real? Well, what about the rest of you, then? You're brilliant, talented, funny as hell, and as much as you try to hide it, you're genuinely a nice person."

"Can we *please* change the subject, I think I might throw up otherwise." His face was beet red.

"I'll back down from the compliments, and yes, we can stop talking about this, I don't want to stress you out. But one more quick thing, do you want me to help you set up a profile on here? Just for fun, if you *are* interested in dating. I'm striking out left and right lately, but it is one of the easier ways to meet people these days."

Will stuck the empty yogurt tub into his brown paper lunch bag and crumpled them up with more force than necessary as the temptation of taking Beverly up on the offer took him over. Oh, just to *have* someone special and dear, someone to hold his hand. To have dinner and smile across the table, to cuddle up on the couch afterwards, maybe even someone to take to bed and…

"Okay," he nodded too hard, trying to organize his jumbled nerves into some facade of composure. "I guess I could give it a try, for…" He shaped his mouth around the foreign word, careful and tentative. "For, um...for fun."

Beverly took a photo of Will and uploaded it to start building the profile. "I look ridiculous," he griped, noticing that as usual his attempted smile looked more like a grimace.

"Trust me, you'll be fine. Now, tell me a little bit about what you're looking for. What kind of relationship?"

"What kind of relationship?" Will asked, "Are there multiple types? I thought dating was just dating."

"Oh, my poor, sweet summer child," Beverly sighed. "I miss the time when I thought that, too. But no, there's Relationship, otherwise known as LTR, there's Something Casual, Marriage, or Not Sure Yet."

"That's the one!" Will pronounced in a gush of relief. "Not Sure Yet, that covers it exactly."

"Great, that's easy enough," she murmured, checking off the appropriate box. "Can you give me an idea of 'your type,' the sort of person you're into? And an age range."

"I don't know," he rubbed his jaw and slumped down in his chair. "Anything between thirty and fifty? Someone highly intelligent, for sure. Liberal values. If they could be in law

enforcement, psychology or medicine it seems like we'd have the best chance of understanding each other. Maybe someone...sophisticated, with plenty of their own hobbies and interests, someone independent who isn't going to try and lean on me for everything they need. But they just sort of...like to spend time with me?"

He laughed nervously, sitting up straighter and drumming his fingers on the table, feeling the need to keep moving around because of the excess energy running through his body. The idea of dating someone like he'd just described was terrifyingly fucking delightful. He was clearly setting himself up for a massive disappointment.

"Wow, well, at that rate, why don't you just date Dr. Lecter?" Beverly grinned, waggling her eyebrows.

Will's mouth went dry as his heart leapt into his throat. "What?"

"I mean, he exactly fits every criteria you just described, plus, I've noticed how well you get along. You're two peas in a pod, and you aren't like that with anyone else. I also know he's not officially your therapist, so if you did hit it off romantically, you could find someone else to be your psychiatrist, right?" She said all of this so casually, as if it was completely normal.

"I can't imagine finding another therapist who would understand me as well as he does. And anyway," he hurried to add, slightly mortified that it came as an afterthought, "We're just friends."

"If you say so." Quickly, she checked off the next few boxes on Will's profile, then looked up in curiosity. "On a related topic, are you looking to date women, men, or both?"

"Oh, uh…" Will cleared his throat, wondering if every question on this app was designed to be irritating and prying. "Both, I guess. I mean either. Doesn't uh, doesn't matter."

"Cool. Okay, you're all set up!" She passed Will his phone back and quickly glanced at the large clock on the wall overhead. "Shit, I've got to get back to the lab. Listen, you should be all good from here; just remember to swipe left if you're not interested in someone and right if you are."

"Easy enough," he lied, fairly sure he was going to delete the app as soon as he got home. The entire system just seemed potentially humiliating and way, way too complicated.

At least by not dating, he didn't have to deal with the continual rejections it would obviously bring. He was so sick of being reminded he didn't fit in, wasn't normal, was broken in ways that were repulsive. This dating app was just an invitation to rub his face in the fact, like voluntary self-punishment, and why had he even gone along with Beverly's suggestion that he make a profile? He drove home thinking he must have indulged her because she was frustrated with her own dating prospects and could use a light activity of some kind to distract her, that was it.

It wasn't like Will had any intention of looking through profiles tonight and maybe even swiping.

Of course not.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Do these people not realize they all write the same exact thing on their profiles?" Will asked Winston incredulously. He sat out on the porch after dinner, a glass of whiskey (liquid courage) on the small table beside him, the dogs resting near his feet.

Winston nudged his head against Will's knee and he chortled, passing him a biscuit from the bag on the table, which of course meant he had to give some to the other dogs as well.

"Calm down, Buster, you've been hyper all day," he chided, looking back at the phone in his free hand, scratching behind everyone's ears in turn until the dogs all settled back down and started drifting off to sleep.

He perused the nearly identical series of profiles with their beaming photos of attractive men and women in his general age bracket. One factor that utterly bewildered him was the overuse of emojis and "Snapchat" (?) filters that hurt his eyes and made it hard to get a good look at anyone. Still, he carried on swiping, enduring countless jokes such as *"Don't worry, I won't send a dick pic unless you ask"* (that was a *joke*, right?) and *"Sorry I don't have a pic of myself holding up a huge fish."*

"I mean, that's actually disappointing," he sighed.

Almost everyone seemed to love dogs, which was the only good thing he'd noted so far. Travel was the next-most-common hobby, and people seemed to love bragging about how many countries they'd traveled to so far. Will had never even left the United States and certainly didn't have time to start dropping everything to go off on exotic jaunts to far-flung destinations.

"Interested in exciting, unconventional types of dates -- take me for a hike on your favorite little-known trail" -- variations of this sort of thing just kept popping up as he proceeded through all the suggested profiles. It was intimidating: he loved the outdoors, and yeah, he knew some pretty nice trails to explore. But he pictured himself trying to talk to a stranger while getting all sweaty (sweatier? It didn't take much to set him off lately) hiking a dusty trail and scowled. He was already getting the idea he was out of his depth and possibly very old-fashioned at the ripe old age of thirty-seven.

"Take me to an escape room!" Someone else enthused in their profile.

"My actual life is an escape room," Will grumbled.

Another frequent bon mots were *"Not interested in a pen pal," "I'm drama free and expect you to be the same,"* and *"Don't bother matching if you don't intend to at least pay the tip on our first date."*

Will groaned. There was something so uncouth, cynical, and deeply unromantic about these statements. Already assuming the worst about anyone they might match with, barking out orders, having pre-formed expectations and demands about every detail...he laughed, then bit his thumb because he was thinking that Hannibal would call people like this unbearably rude. Will had to agree they seemed tacky, and then he noticed he was agreeing with Hannibal during an imaginary conversation. *Then* he reminded himself to stop referring to Dr. Lecter by first name in his thoughts.

He matched with a few people who seemed relatively decent, though the chats seemed to consist of two options: tepid, vague comments about how they were both doing and what they had going on this week; *or* the other person immediately starting to flirt with him very aggressively. Will wasn't sure how to keep either type of conversation going, but he was just lonely enough and just intrigued enough at the thought of having regular company at least on some evenings in his future that he did his best to keep pace.

By the time he went to bed, he had three dates set up for the rest of the week, and he felt weirdly torn between looking forward to them and dreading them. As usual, he lay there in the dark staring up at the ceiling as disturbing flashbacks about the recent crime scenes intruded his thoughts, threatening to make themselves a thousand times more vivid in his dreams. It was a laugh, to imagine he'd find someone who'd tolerate him waking up drenched in sweat, shaken from nightmares which often felt more like hallucinations, or worse, real specters determined to yank him into the darkness until he became a killer himself.

Charming. I'm a real catch.

Tossing and turning, he tried to visualize what the dates might be like instead. A cup of coffee at a cafe, a glass of wine at a bar, a chance to chat in person and maybe find a spark. Even though he perfectly remembered the profile pics of the two women and one man with whom he'd connected so far, Will only saw them as indistinct blurred figures in his imaginings of the scenarios. Instead, his mind leaped right to the idea of discussing the dates after the fact, with Dr. Lecter.

He wondered if Lecter would have some helpful advice about navigating the dating world when you were neurodivergent, bashful, and scared out of your mind at the prospect. He even wondered whether Lecter might start to look just a little jealous if Will told him about his dates with other people, and immediately felt himself getting hard in his boxers.

Will rolled over and mashed his face into the pillow with a wretched moan of sexual frustration. He couldn't jerk off thinking about Hannibal, objectify him like that when the interest was wholly one-sided. How could he even look him in the eyes the next time he saw the man if he gave into the longing currently making his dick full, heavy and throbbing?

Still, he couldn't seem to shake off the memory of Hannibal's deep, soft but raspy voice in that wonderful accent, the way he always spoke to Will with such utterly sincere interest. As if he cared about Will as a person who deserved that care, not as a remarkable freak whose brain belonged in a jar in some laboratory. He couldn't stop thinking of Hannibal's flawlessly handsome face or the fit of those fancy suits on his broad, strong-looking frame, perhaps worst of all his big, powerful hands always folded in his lap as if Hannibal could hide their

potential ferocity with his calmly composed demeanor. Will wanted those hands all over him, wanted that voice saying filthy things in his ear before those sharp-looking teeth bit him hard…

"Fuck," Will muttered, helplessly moving his hips in rough thrusts against the soft blankets, bringing himself to a rushed and brutal climax, spilling thickly inside his shorts.

Well, this was embarrassing, he thought afterwards, flushed but slightly satiated, better able to fall asleep (once he cleaned up). His heart was still speeding, but his limbs were pleasantly heavy and he could relax his body in a way that reminded him his body *could* relax. He didn't have to live in a constant state of internal disorder that varied only from mild, stifled anxiety to unmanageably huge panic attacks. It felt like despite everything uncomfortably strange about him, there was still a chance he could enjoy life, carve out a happy existence for himself. Not always feel so insurmountably alone. Maybe sex shouldn't mean so much to him, but for some reason it just did...even though he only wanted it with a partner he had real feelings for, who felt the same for him. That could definitely be a problem.

At least Hannibal Lecter would never know how Will felt about him, or that he'd given into such a completely inappropriate crush alone in bed like some lovelorn teenager. Thank God.

The first three dates were pitiful, but worse still was the way Will got himself so damn worked up beforehand. He went on a few more dates the following week to try and shake off the anxiety, get himself used to the fact that there was no commitment, no need to fear anything, these were just light "getting to know you dates" that were intended to be *fun*. There was that word again. He wondered if it referred to a myth, or just something that other people got to have.

Every time he walked up to a coffee shop or a restaurant to meet a stranger for a date, Will felt his heart pounding out of control, his body going into flight mode, seeming to scream at him in warning that this was a bad idea, it was going to go horribly and leave him humiliated, feeling even more alone and incapable of being loved by anyone ever.

Still, he forced himself to go through with the dates, reasoning that his fears were silly and he could find a way to manage them. Some of the people he met were perfectly nice, but there was just no chemistry at all between them. Sometimes people were absolutely awful, nothing like they seemed on their profile or chats, and he made some excuse to practically run away as quickly as he could.

Sometimes there actually *was* a hint of potential chemistry and then -- male or female, it was the same -- the person inevitably just wanted to sleep with him, as soon as possible. He wasn't ready to jump into bed with a date, simply because the person was attractive and found him to be, as well. He'd had one night stands, plenty of them, in fact, scattered over the years of his adulthood. Every one of them had made him feel so hollow and used afterwards, wanting to hold onto his lover and stay close, warm, but the other person inevitably seemed to make some excuse to get out of bed and away from him permanently now that they had gotten what they wanted.

On this type of date, the person seemed to tune out completely when Will talked about his life and interests, but rubbed their foot against his under the table or reached out to squeeze his knee over drinks or dinner. He might want to try out a kiss at the end of the night, but doing this seemed to encourage people to get extremely forward and handsy in a way that made him want to scream. It was too soon, and they clearly didn't want a damn thing from him except for his body. It hurt to think there wasn't anything else about him worth being interested in. His empathy made it even worse because he could feel with intense accuracy exactly how superficial their desire was. Furthermore, was asking for consent before groping a completely foreign concept in the dating world these days?

"Talk about a moodkiller," Beverly sighed when Will confided in her about his latest blundering disaster-dates. "I hate to say it, but that type of behavior is pretty typical. Sometimes I just wanna get laid, too, so it's alright, but all the same I wonder what ever happened to manners, or a deeper connection, you know?"

Zeller came into the lab, interrupting their chat with the latest results from his tests on the murder scene they were currently investigating.

"Hey," he grinned, his face lighting up at the sight of Beverly, "You look nice today."

Beverly looked down at her teal silk blouse and sensible black work trousers in bemusement. "Yeah, okay." She shot Zeller a wry smile and rolled her eyes. "What do you want, Zeller?"

"Um, nothing," Zeller replied in a rare burst of nervousness. He even blushed slightly. "Just an observation. I'm going to...I'll head over and run these results by Agent Crawford, see what he thinks we should do next."

"Sounds like a plan," she noted, already not paying him much attention as she went back to her work, carefully analyzing remnants of grass and leaves pulled from the dead body to try and find some trace the killer might have left of their own identity.

Will looked with interest from Beverly's all-business expression and the way Zeller stood there gazing at her for another few moments before he turned and left, barely noticing that Will was even in the room.

"Oh, hey, Graham," Zeller mumbled on his way out the door, "See you later."

"Yeah," Will nodded. He turned back to Beverly once they were alone. "Why don't you just date Zeller?"

"*Brian*?" Beverly put down her tweezers and stepped back from the corpse so she could burst into uproarious laughter. "And me? Come on, there's no way. What would even make you think of that?"

Will quirked a brow and took a sip of his coffee, wondering if Beverly was intentionally ignoring the fact of his powerful empathy. He also knew the tells of trying to pretend you didn't like someone, because he had to do it on a daily basis himself when it came to Hannibal.

“Nothing,” he smiled, “It’s just an observation.”

Throughout the weeks since he’d joined the obnoxious “hive” on Bumble, Will kept up his appointments with Hann-- Dr. Lecter, but he had never been able to get up the nerve to discuss his love life. They talked about the cases and Will’s struggle to manage his fear when Jack sent him to dark places, and Hannibal was Will’s paddle in stormy waters, the only one who really seemed to see and understand him, down to the last scary detail, without ever wanting to flinch away.

Will wished that Hannibal would get even closer, but the idea of bringing it up himself and potentially ruining their special bond made him overcompensate in acting withdrawn, avoiding any bodily contact with his therapist, shying away from even the smallest potential brush of shoulders and hands while the mere thought of the touch made his mouth water.

“I’m deleting this dumb fucking app,” he told Zoe one night at home, after another hour or so of miserable swiping in his chair by the fire.

The dog’s only response was to sit up and bark, paws bent prettily in front of her until he laughed and patted her head. “Okay, let’s go outside.”

His pack of former strays bounded all over the yard playing delightedly together as Will leaned his elbows on the porch railing, letting the chilly, light drizzle in the air calm his nerves as much as such a thing was even possible. He seemed to be zigzagging nonstop from stress over the killers in his mind and sadness at his continual loneliness, with no end in sight.

Before he knew it, he was swiping again out of listless reflex, not thinking much of it. “Winston, leave that alone,” he called out, prompting the dog to drop the enormous tree branch he’d been trying to pick up with his teeth.

Will swiped on and on, starting absently to think about his dinner options: hot dogs and beans if he was going to be lazy about it, steak and potatoes maybe if he could summon the energy.

“‘*Married, playing with permission*’.” Will laughed sarcastically and swiped left. “‘*I have eight cats and they come first,”*’ someone else warned. He could actually respect the sentiment, but no way would his dogs put up with that arrangement. Left swipe.

Then a familiar face slid onto the screen, making his heart stop. He almost dropped the phone. It was Hannibal.

Hannibal, 47, psychiatrist at private practice, interested in women and men, looking for Something Casual, liberal, non smoker, drinks socially, carnivore, exercises regularly, not a pet owner, no kids but might want them someday

Will stared adoringly at that smug, know-it-all smile in the photo, wondering why Hannibal’s ego was so endearing. There was a vulnerability underneath all that smooth elegance and Will wanted to hold it tenderly in his hands, wanted to get his fingers deep into that perfect

silver-strewn hair and muss Hannibal up entirely, wreck his expensive bespoke suits and have Hannibal thanking him for it.

"Dammit." Will rolled his eyes at his own folly. He shouldn't be hesitating; he could not possibly swipe right and indicate he was interested in dating Hannibal. Still, what could it hurt to examine his profile just one more time?

So, Hannibal was ten years older than him. He'd guessed it must be around there, but seeing it in a clearly defined number was really fucking sexy for some reason. Not to mention the confirmation that Hannibal was also open to dating a man...that sent a pleasurable shiver through Will's body. But Hannibal was looking for something casual...the opposite of what Will wanted. Will was exhausted with only being good enough for everyone's "something casual," and that was one more reason he was going to swipe "NOPE" just as soon as he made a thorough review of the rest of Hannibal's photos…

Hannibal in an impeccable tux...at the opera, most likely, a glass of champagne in one hand and a warm smile on his face, happily anticipating an evening of enlightening culture. Hannibal in his kitchen with a large pan between his oven-mitt-clad hands, clearly very proud of his latest culinary masterpiece, some kind of insanely fancy casserole.

Will guessed it made sense that Hannibal was interested in having children someday...after all, Abigail had recently become a surrogate daughter of sorts to them. Even though Will knew he had to proceed with the utmost sensitive caution when he interacted with Abigail, Hannibal was completely right when he intuited Will's paternal leanings towards the girl. It seemed this was an instinct they both shared, to help guide a young life into happiness and self-discovery, to have a good influence, to make a difference in that way...to have a legacy, even. To think they could share that warm sense of parental pride together...it sent another pang of dismay through him, knowing he was slipping into foolish fantasy yet again.

With a sigh so sad and an ache inside that felt bone-deep, Will swiped "No" on Hannibal's profile.

Only a second later, he jolted back up again with a horrified little cry. "Shit!"

"IT'S A MATCH!" The notification on the screen exalted, showering Will and Hannibal's side-by-side profile photos with confetti.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, yes...coming up in the next chapter, *finally*, ::enter Hannibal:: :))))

Chapter 3

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” Will must have swiped in the wrong direction by mistake.

The dogs barked attentively, noticing their beloved owner’s upset, and he waved a hand to shush them. “I’m fine, guys, don’t worry. C’mon and get your dinner.”

Will was not fine. He prepared the dogs’ food and set the dishes out with shaking hands, feeling the typical slick of agitated sweat starting to prickle every inch of his skin as a headache set in. After all this time spent carefully hiding his feelings for Hannibal, he had to go and ruin the one good relationship in his life with this embarrassing screw-up!

He didn’t want to lose Hannibal. Imagining his life without Hannibal to turn to was gut-wrenchingly awful. But then...slowly it dawned on him that Hannibal had swiped right, too. He *had* to have done so, or the two of them wouldn’t have matched.

Mired in horror, but unable to look away, like he was staring at a car wreck, Will checked the chat feature. Nothing there from Hannibal. Well, of course not. At most, the doctor would gently remind Will that an intimate relationship between them was impossible. Maybe Hannibal had made the same mistake Will had, and accidentally swiped right.

Still, it was very unlike Hannibal to make a mistake about something so specific.

This is ridiculous, he thought as he showered after a hurried dinner he couldn't taste. He scrubbed his hair a little too hard, getting soap in his eyes and wincing. *How did I manage to make my disastrous foray into online dating even more ridiculous?* It almost defied belief.

Hannibal might not even be logged into the app right now, and probably wouldn’t message Will tonight.

Unless he did.

Will got into bed and pulled the covers up over his head, leaving the phone on the bedside table with notifications and sound on, just in case this *wasn’t* ridiculous. He’d just started trying to self-soothe by imagining scenarios where Hannibal actually wanted him when his phone gave a cheerful chirp.

Will scrambled up to grab it, nearly dropping it on the floor in his haste. Hannibal had initiated a chat with one simple phrase: ”Hello, Will," followed by...a blushing emoji?

Hannibal used emojis? Suddenly they didn’t seem so obnoxious anymore, but sweet and charming. And the suggestion was that Will had made the soul of eloquent sophistication, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, *blush*?

Will typed a quick reply, deciding to coast along this surge of adrenaline making him desperately keen to know what Hannibal would type next.

“Hi. So, this is kind of weird."

He stared at the tiny bouncing circles on the screen and the phrase “Hannibal is typing,” feeling he was lost in a surreal haze.

“Well, it is certainly unorthodox, but as our relationship has always been so, perhaps this is a natural next step.”

Will’s fingers flew over the keys: ”You’re attracted to me?”

Hannibal replied just as speedily, ”Of course. And deeply curious about you, in what has become a distinctly not-platonic sense the more we’ve come to know one another. Come, now, Will, surely you have noticed my attitude towards you."

Will grinned until his cheeks hurt, which never happened. It was true, but he had been afraid to believe it. He had noticed -- how could he not? Hannibal hadn’t been subtle. Since the very first day they met, Dr. Lecter had gone out of his way to spend time with Will, to show interest in getting to know him, and concern in his ongoing mental crises that had nothing to do with Jack’s original objectives for assigning the profile. And the meals which Hannibal made him always seemed extra lavish, even by the doctor’s usual standards, like he was trying to impress Will. Then there were Hannibal’s lovely, mysterious caramel eyes, following Will everywhere he went, but darting away if Will looked back too incisively.

”I guess I did think you were curious...maybe I just wasn’t ready to deal with it yet,” Will explained.

”And are you feeling the same about me, Will?" Hannibal supplemented the question with another blushing emoji. ”Curious?"

”Very,” Will typed back immediately, his heart pounding.

”I’m delighted,” said Hannibal, following up with one of those smiley face emojis with hearts for eyes.

Will thought he was going to faint.

”I can’t believe this is happening,” he typed, ”I’ve been having the worst luck on here, and to actually find you, to find out you’re interested...do you want to meet up sometime and talk about this, or do we need to renegotiate our professional relationship first?”

Surely this was the chat version of babbling, but Will was too excited to care.

”I have a suggestion. Why don’t we make a pact, here and now, that regardless of the outcome in any more intimate endeavor between us, we will remain friends and colleagues, should the intimate endeavors not yield a successful result?”

”I don’t know if it’s that easy.” Will chewed his lower lip, wishing it was that simple to just make a promise to stay friends and believe it could work. Then he’d know for sure he couldn’t lose Hannibal no matter how outrageously awkward things got. ”If we date and it doesn’t work out, it could be messy."

”I think the mess we might make if it does work out would render the risk more than worth it,” said Hannibal.

Will wondered if he was actually swooning at this point. He felt dizzy, like he was floating on a cloud, and he couldn’t wipe the smile off his face. The sexual undercurrent in Hannibal’s chosen phrase sent a jolt of arousal through his body.

”I hope so,” Will replied, adding a plain smiley face, which was as adventurous as he felt like getting with the emoji options.

”I have another proposal. Since you mentioned having negative past experiences with this app, and I’m assuming poor results from the dates it has led to, I would like to make it up to you.”

”What do you mean? It’s not your fault I’ve been matching with people who haven’t worked out. It's another one of my special talents.”

”I want you to enjoy our time together." Damn. Even when he couldn't see Will or hear his voice, Hannibal could still tell when he was using humor to cloak painful truth. "I am aware that it is difficult to have an open mind for positive expectation in any experience wherein one has previously had only negative associations. Due to your track record of unsatisfactory dates, you might approach our own date with pessimism.”

”I mean, yeah,” Will admitted. “ I’m excited to go out with you, but I’m also assuming it will end terribly, that I’ll make a fool of myself or find out something about you that just isn’t compatible. I may as well tell you that these haven’t been ‘unsatisfactory’ dates, they’ve been disasters, and I’ve drawn the conclusion that I myself am not much of a catch. Too prickly, too strange, my foot in my mouth all the time...I don’t have a single positive association attached to the idea of dating."

”Then let’s change that. I suggest we engage in a bit of role play, Will. Are you game?”

”Role play?” Will blushed more deeply, picturing various BDSM scenarios as well as other types of kinky costumes either of them might wear, surprised at the quick way his mind manifested the raunchy visions.

”Yes. We will follow the stereotypical guidelines of a dating app meet-up, down to the letter. Perhaps you’d be amenable to meeting me for a drink tomorrow night at Elixir in Baltimore.”

”Okay, sounds good. Around 8?”

”Perfect. And we don’t have to stay for dinner unless we decide that we are interested in continuing the date. I look forward to meeting you in person, Will. If your photo is any indication, you’re quite stunning.”

Will laughed, raking a hand through his hair self-consciously, as if Hannibal could see him, see the bashfully elated impact of his words.

”I can’t wait," Will typed, ”I’ll see you then.”

”Goodnight, Will,” Hannibal replied, and he ended the chat with a kiss emoji.

It was just a silly, round yellow happy face with a little red heart on the mouth, but it meant everything to Will. He stared at it for what seemed like ages, waiting in vain for his heart to stop thundering, and then once he’d finally put the phone aside, he was up all night ablaze with wild anticipation. He was out of his depth; there was no way the actual date with Hannibal could live up to the crazy emphasis he was letting it have.

Unless it did.

Chapter 4

Will assumed that since he already knew and liked Hannibal, he wouldn't have another panic attack on his way to the date, but he'd guessed wrong.

As he drove into Baltimore and found parking near the upscale restaurant which Hannibal had suggested, Will had the excruciating sensation that his heart was out to get him. It was beating painfully hard and fast, all while disparaging thoughts about himself echoed through his brain, reminding him he was bad at this, his dates never worked out, and the fact that he had a thing for Hannibal Lecter was only going to make the let-down even worse.

What happened to all his bubbly optimism from the night before, and why couldn't he get it back? He'd been worried since he started getting dressed, obsessing in a distinctly uncharacteristic way about whether his shirt matched his jacket, and if he should wear a tie. Ultimately, he eschewed the tie idea since every tie he had was admittedly hideous, and landed on his nicest suit, the one he brought out for performance reviews at work. It was dark grey, recently dry-cleaned and pressed, unlike the rest of his wardrobe, and paired well with his trusty plain black buttoned shirt. He combed his hair while it was still wet from the shower, but the curls sprung out haphazardly as ever the more it dried. Will couldn't stand the idea of putting gel in it to fix the problem; hair products had an artificial texture to them he had never liked.

By the time he walked up to Elixir, with its big black door and moody ambiance, Will had nearly convinced himself he should turn right back around and go home where he belonged, alone and secluded. Hannibal would understand; he could send him a text explaining that he didn't think it was worth risking their friendship after all.

But there Hannibal was, lingering on the sidewalk apparently calm as can be, exuding that steady warmth in his demeanor that always put Will at ease.

Like Will, Hannibal had gone without a tie, but the three piece suit he wore only looked sexier for the absence of it, and the extra button open at Hannibal's neck. The suit was grey, but a much lighter shade than Will's own, and like all of Hannibal's clothes it hugged the man's exquisite physique to distracting perfection.

Hannibal looked so soft in the moment when he saw Will, a guileless smile lighting up his face, a lock of greying hair slipping down across his brow. "You must be Will," he said politely, extending his hand.

"Hannibal?" Will made himself say, but it was hard to talk around the lump in his throat. Fuck, this was worse than he'd feared. Hannibal was so beautiful, so charming, and losing this chance to connect with him more closely was going to be beyond disappointing...it would be crushing.

Hannibal's smile faded slightly. He let go of Will's hand after shaking it as if they were meeting for the first time, in accordance with the playful rules he'd introduced. But upon

seeing the worry etched all over Will's face, Hannibal switched back to reality, watching his friend with concern.

"Will, is everything okay?"

"I'm sorry, we're not even inside yet and I'm freaking out. I can't believe this, I thought just this *once!*"

"Breathe, Will," Hannibal urged gently, "All is well. Why don't you tell me what you were hoping to avoid?"

"I thought just this once I wouldn't have a panic attack and show up out of sorts as a result," Will admitted, fighting back tears of frustration verging dangerously on self-hatred.

"I see. Would you let me try something, Will? I think I know of a way to help set your mind at ease." Hannibal stood in front of him, seeking out Will's runaway gaze.

"Okay," Will nodded. "At this point, I'll try anything."

"Then step over here, please." Hannibal strode to a more secluded area where an awning overhead lent them shadows. Then he lifted his hand to softly stroke Will's cheek. "Alright?"

"Hmm?" Will asked, his skin burning under Hannibal's fingers, his eyes finally finding the nerve to meet Hannibal's amber gaze, only to fall in deeper than ever.

"Is it alright if I touch you, like this?" Hannibal asked.

Will nodded, "Please."

"And this…" Hannibal leaned in, hovered his lips above Will's. There was no other contact between their bodies; just Hannibal's hand on Will's cheek, his thumb rubbing the gentlest circles, and the warmth of Hannibal's breath, so achingly close.

"Is this alright?" Hannibal whispered, and Will heard himself say "Yes" from somewhere underwater.

Hannibal pressed his lips to Will's, a tentative, careful kiss free of pressure or ardor. Will didn't understand the effort it took for Hannibal to kiss him so chastely until their mouths parted and Hannibal released a low sigh, his eyes blazing with desire. "Feel better?" he asked, his accent thicker than usual.

"Y-yes," Will answered, trying so hard to hold onto the sensation of Hannibal's lips brushing against his own, the brief, ever so slightly wet heat of that moment.

"You aren't going to fumble this date, Will. It's simply not possible." Hannibal's kind smile changed to something far sterner as he added, "And it's a matter of no small vexation to me to consider how you must have been treated in the past, how *carelessly* you must have been treated, that you continually endure this sort of trepidation prior to a first date."

"It's my own fault--"

“It isn’t. Will, it never was.” Hannibal leaned close again to kiss his forehead, then he murmured, “Let me make it all better?”

“Yeah,” Will nodded, shaky but weirdly delighted, trusting Hannibal in a way he couldn’t have predicted. He smiled, “Can we start over?”

“I’d be utterly charmed." Hannibal offered Will his arm, like a hero in a Jane Austen novel, and Will slipped his own through it, nestling his hand into place with that floating feeling settling over his body again. "Shall we?”

“You know, Will, I have to say you look even better in person than in your profile picture.” Hannibal smiled and pulled out Will’s chair as they settled into their corner table.

The place was intimate, dim and inviting, setting Will even more at ease with the only background noise the low hum of pleasant dinner conversation around them. The candlelit setting felt unmistakably romantic. He chuckled at Hannibal’s cheesy line, wondering what was worse, how thoroughly Hannibal was enjoying their little premise of being strangers, or how much he liked it himself.

“Thank you; you look great, too.” Will watched with interest as Hannibal unfastened his jacket buttons, revealing a pale lavender shirt and a snugly fitted waistcoat. “Really great.” He cleared his throat. “What are you going to have to drink?”

He asked the question to divert attention from his compliments, and Hannibal knew it.

“Thank you. It’s nice of you to say so. And as for my drink…” Hannibal casually perused the menu. “Do you like a cabernet?” His eyes sparkled.

“I actually love cabernet,” Will smiled. Alcohol, was it alcohol? That's all that really mattered to him now. He was way too nervous to get through this without a drink.

Will squinted in confusion as Hannibal pulled a folded sheet of paper from his jacket pocket. “What’s that? This isn’t a session, doctor, you can’t take notes on me.”

“I’m suggesting we take a very different sort of notes on each other over drinks.”

“Dr. Lecter, you’re back,” said a friendly young man dressed all in black save for a white apron. He paused by their table as Will flinched slightly at the unexpected intrusion.

“Will Graham, this is Caleb Thornton, the highly talented chef of this establishment. Caleb, allow me to introduce my very dear friend Will.” Hannibal’s face beamed with pride, as if it was a pleasure to present Will as his close friend. Will couldn’t help but think Hannibal was showing him off a little bit, and it made him feel warm and tingly all over.

Caleb was probably around Will’s age, with reddish-blonde hair and a neat beard. Mellow green eyes shone as he shook Will’s hand, looking at him as if somehow surprised and intrigued. “Great to meet you, Will. Please tell me you two will be ordering off of the Chef’s Specials menu tonight. I’ve got a shellfish tower that will blow your mind.”

Caleb had slipped into talking only to Will, staring in admiration.

Hannibal answered in a voice that sounded like smooth, deadly poison, “A difficult task to achieve, yet one you have consistently performed in the past, Caleb. We haven’t yet decided if we’ll be staying for dinner, but if we do, we shall certainly take your recommendation under advisement.”

Hannibal’s whole attitude towards his acquaintance had shifted, apparently as a result of the way Caleb looked at Will. Instead of the warm and easy smile with which he had greeted the man, Hannibal now manifested stiff posture and a bristly demeanor, his hands primly moving items around the table unnecessarily: the silverware, his napkin, which apparently needed to be folded, unfolded, and then the same again. Will got the distinct and almost frightening impression that Hannibal was holding himself back from losing his temper, and the idea that it was because he couldn’t stand to see anyone else flirting with Will, well that was...amazing. Exciting.

“If there’s nothing else,” Hannibal said coldly, and Caleb, who now looked totally baffled, nodded and backed away.

“Oh, of course. I’ll let you two enjoy your evening. Shall I have them send over a bottle of the Chateau Latour Cabernet?”

This seemed to fuel Hannibal’s exasperation as he gave a short nod. “Just so.”

“Thank you, it was nice to meet you,” Will mumbled, unable to take his eyes off of Hannibal’s slightly flushed countenance. He felt like crawling right across the table and climbing into his lap, rocking and grinding until Hannibal was groaning, falling apart beneath him, the two of them making a wild public display, creating their very own scandal.

“A shellfish *tower*?” Will remarked, sliding his water glass closer when a waitress stopped by to fill it with water. “Thank you.” Turning back to Hannibal, who had calmed slightly, he added, “Sounds like the kind of thing you would make.”

“And I would make it better,” Hannibal winked. “With a far more ornate presentation worthy of such a feast. However, there is something to be said for taking a break from doing all of the work myself, every now and again. And there are few restaurants in town which I find worthy of my interest. Just as there are even fewer individuals.”

“I’m honored, then,” Will answered, trying not to spill ice water all over himself as he took a small sip, still trembling slightly at Hannibal’s apparent jealousy, and now the excessive compliments, *Jesus.* Will hadn’t realized he liked any of this stuff before tonight, and now he couldn’t get enough. He wasn’t sure he’d really like all the attention and praise, though, if they came from anyone else.

“You’re a humble man, Will Graham. And now perhaps we can turn to my list.” He passed the sheet of creamy stationary over to Will, who ran his fingers over the perfect cursive letters in Hannibal’s usual fountain pen.

From the desk of Doctor Hannibal Lecter was printed neatly across the top of the page. Beneath it, Hannibal's handwriting appeared in meticulously perfect curves and flourishes, as if the content was vitally special.

"'100 Icebreaker Questions for your First Date?'" Will read aloud.

"I don't think we'll have time for all one hundred, of course," Hannibal smiled as the waitress reappeared with their drinks. "Thank you," he nodded, turning back to Will and proposing a toast. "To getting to know each other."

"To getting to know each other." Will clinked his glass to Hannibal's, then took a sip of the rich, full-bodied wine. His eyes lingered on the paper, thinking how absurd and cute it was that Hannibal would sit at his desk copying the list out by hand instead of just printing it from whatever website he'd found it on. Picking the first question, he asked amusedly, "So, do you enjoy your current job?"

"Most days, yes, when I feel I've been helpful. That is my foremost measure of success, and the reason I was drawn to a career in psychology," Hannibal replied. "And you?"

Will laughed darkly and buried his face in his hands.

"Remember, I'm not asking as your therapist, or even your friend. We're experimenting with taking it further, and that colors every question, even your answers. What would you say to a potential mate on this subject?"

"Uhhh, if I couldn't *change* the subject, I'd say God, no, I hate my job with a virulent passion. I think my job is eating away at my soul and on bad days, even my sanity. And I can't stop because I'm saving lives." He shrugged. "That kind of negativity doesn't usually land well on a first date."

"Actually, I admire your honesty, and I'm grateful you wanted to open up to me," Hannibal replied. "I'm in no position to advise other than to say that it's my belief you deserve to be happy, as happy as you possibly can be, despite what others want and need from you. And that I'm here to offer an understanding ear anytime you need to talk."

"That goes for you, too," Will said thoughtfully, letting his hand edge carefully across the black satin tablecloth, towards Hannibal's own. He brushed his pinky finger delicately over Hannibal's. "You can always talk to me."

"I'd like to talk to you some more," Hannibal replied, his voice husky. "May I be so bold as to request your company for dinner this evening? If, that is, you agree with me that this is going well."

"I have a panic attack and complain about work and you think it's going well?" Will teased, unable to hide his self-conscious concerns over the facts.

"I want you to be yourself, Will. Whatever version of yourself you are at any given moment is the man I want to spend time with. You don't have to pretend when we're together, unless

of course, we are playing." He ran the tip of his index finger slowly over Will's knuckles, and Will swallowed a gasp. "Do you like to play, Will? To be played with?"

"I think I'd like it with you."

Hannibal grinned, flashing his pearly white fangs. "Excellent. So it's decided. I hope you brought your appetite."

Will clutched at his belly, laughing so hard his sides ached. "No, I'm serious!" He picked an oyster from the three-tiered offering of seafood between them and repeated the question from the list. "If you had to kiss any animated character, who would it be?"

"I haven't watched a children's film in many, many years, but I have always particularly enjoyed the tale of Beauty and the Beast." Hannibal watched attentively as Will consumed the smooth, cold oyster, pausing with his own fork hovered over the scallops carpaccio on his plate. "And I've always had a special preference for charming young brunettes with lovely curls and big, expressive eyes...soft, pillowy lips…" He gazed steadily as Will started getting flustered again, then added, "Especially if they look even more beautiful when they're feeling shy. It tends to make me wonder what lies beneath the bashful surface, and how they might look in more blatantly erotic circumstances, naked and debauched beneath me. And so, I suppose I would choose Belle."

Will thought his face was probably going to get stuck in this particular shade of extremely aroused and overwhelmed scarlet. "But you're not a beast," he managed to tease.

"Just you wait until we're alone, when the time is right, if I should be so lucky," Hannibal replied, as calmly as if he was discussing the most innocuous topic, but the lust in his eyes told the real story.

"God," Will sighed, "Do you normally say things like that in public?"

"You bring out my naughty side. And I think it's my turn to ask a question now, isn't it?" He glanced down at the list, although Will had a bizarre notion he had it memorized. "What are some little things that bring happiness to your everyday life?"

"Hmm, well, my dogs," Will considered, going bright and cheerful as he always did when he thought of his pets. "And fishing. I like my house, I like the peacefulness of it, the serenity."

"A boat out on a sea of fog, your respite from the world of blood and despair."

"That's the kind of thing you say to me in session," Will accused.

"Old habits. I'll try to refrain from the psychoanalysis."

"Is that hard? Do you feel the need to continually analyze everything and everyone in your life?" Will asked, slightly concerned that the two of them might encounter the same obstacle that characterized his ill-fated near-romance with Alana. If Hannibal couldn't stop picking his mind apart, they would never reach true intimacy, just a glorified professional fixation.

“It’s not hard for me to shut it off, if you don’t want me to do it,” Hannibal explained. “If there’s something you want or need, I want to give it to you enough that my own temptations come secondary.”

“Time with you,” Will added quickly, before he lost his nerve. “The time I spend with you is something that brings me happiness.”

Hannibal’s face registered a strange disturbance which Will couldn’t understand, as if Will’s words were revelatory.

“I’m sorry, was that too much?” Will asked. “I’m not exactly adept at flirtation.”

“It wasn’t too much,” said Hannibal, “Will, it was perfect.”

“Before we say goodnight, perhaps we could exchange numbers so that we can communicate with each other outside of the app?” Hannibal proposed after walking Will to his car. It turned out that they had both parked in the same lot, though Will had been so agitated earlier that he hadn't even noticed Hannibal's car.

“I guess I’d be amenable to that. Can I ask you for something else, besides your number?” Will inquired, stepping close to Hannibal and daring to toy with the lapels of his overcoat.

“Always,” Hannibal smiled indulgently.

“Kiss me again?” Will heard the tremor in his voice but added more firmly, “Harder this time, please.”

Hannibal backed Will up against the car and cupped his face in both hands, laying a molten kiss on his lips without another word.

“*Oh,*” Will moaned, wrapping his arms around Hannibal, clutching at his waist and feeling over the solid strength of his back. Their tongues met and stroked together languidly, learning the taste and feel of each other. Will was sure he'd never be able to have enough of this.

“Will,” Hannibal whispered between kisses, their mouths colliding with messier intensity before Hannibal’s teeth nipped Will’s lower lip, evoking a small yelp.

Will sighed and kissed Hannibal even harder, then sucked his bottom lip with a low, vibrating, “Mmm…”

“Will,” Hannibal said again, and this time it was in earnest warning. “If we don’t stop now, I’m going to have you right out in the open, slammed up against your car. And I hardly think that’s appropriate, especially on a first date, is it?”

“I…” Will looked up at him, dazed with longing. “I guess not. I mean, yeah, you’re right. We should stop. For tonight.”

“I’m going to be thinking about the sounds that came from this pretty mouth when I kissed you,” Hannibal murmured, tracing the shape of Will’s lips with his thumb, “All night until I sleep. And Will, I might not be able to hold back from touching myself at the thought.”

“Good,” Will said boldly, with a possessive tug on Hannibal’s coat collar. “I’ll think about your hand on your cock with my name on your lips, if that’s okay with you.”

Hannibal growled, seizing him with a big, commanding palm to the back of his head and claiming his lips again with wet, hungry fervor. Will’s fingers dug into his shoulders, and when they drew back they were breathless.

“I had an amazing time with you,” Will ventured cheekily, knowing that if he went back to their “strangers” game at this moment it would drive Hannibal wild. “I’d love to see you again sometime. Maybe text me later?”

“You’re a very naughty boy, Will. And you inspire my most depraved tendencies with such ease. I’m even more curious than before.” Hannibal opened the driver’s side door for Will like a gentleman and leaned in as Will put the key in the ignition.

Breathing heavily, Hannibal added, "I think I'll need to refer you to another therapist, as I'm feeling a powerful conflict of interest."

“Thanks for dinner,” Will smiled, and with an answering smirk, Hannibal shut the door, walking off towards his Bentley looking positively delighted with life.

Hannibal hadn’t known what to expect from the date with Will, and that was one of his main reasons for initiating the idea. He had developed a habit of lying to himself that he was interested in getting closer to Will because the brilliant profiler was the likeliest to discern his identity as the Chesapeake Ripper, and he needed to have plans ready in case this should occur. The encephalitis, which was not only convenient but a beautiful wonder to behold, would only last so long before Hannibal had to intervene. He didn’t want Will dead unless it was an unavoidable necessity to protect his own continued freedom. The illness would fog Will’s mind, providing a useful vulnerability, but one of these days that smoke would clear, and it was a nearly forgone conclusion Will would look at him once healed and see the truth of him. So for now, in a wise variation of "keep one's friends close and one's potential enemies closer," he knew he must intertwine himself with Will Graham's life, make himself indispensable, twist Will's perception of him until the other man was ready -- as Hannibal hoped he would be someday -- to see the truth of Hannibal and want to keep looking.

Still, he went on trying to deceive himself that the passionate attraction, even the fierce possessiveness he felt for the man was some passing fancy, an infatuation stronger and more resilient than any he had experienced before, but surely not what he most feared it could be. Surely not love.

Hannibal had originally created the dating app profile because it was the ideal way to meet new people, some of whom might be added to his Rolodex for future reference; some of whom might be suitable candidates if the mood for sex happened to strike. In truth, that latter

mood struck very rarely, as Hannibal was usually quite content with self love to satiate his considerable libido. Since he'd yet to find a lover with whom he wanted to share his whole self, there was little appeal. But that had all changed the day he met Will.

Will was different. Hannibal had not yet been able to shake the horrible memory of the day he sent Will to die at the hands of Tobias Budge, all in a foolish fit of jealousy over Will kissing Alana Bloom. Just that easily, in a moment of childish anger, he could have lost Will, and when he saw him again after surviving Tobias' attempt on his own life, Hannibal knew that whatever he felt for Will had burrowed deeper into his heart than any emotion he'd felt since Mischa. It was a powerful affection, so much that his continued manipulation of Will had come to feel like a burden instead of the amusing hobby it should be, and rather than hurting Will more, he wanted to make him smile. The night Will matched with him, Hannibal was almost unbearably elated, filled with dreams and schemes of dates with the handsome profiler, and every flavor of decadent eroticism he wanted to take out on Will's luscious body in bed. He ought to have nerves of steel, even around the object of his attraction, but instead Hannibal had a belly full of butterflies as he tightened his grip on the steering wheel driving home, his skin buzzing with the sensation of Will's touch. He could still taste Will's lips and the insistent wet thrust of his tongue, and he hadn't been exaggerating about how his evening was certainly going to end.

However, it was worrisome to think, as he must, despite the unusual pummeling of his heart against his ribcage and the smile that wouldn't seem to abandon his normally composed features, that when it came to Will Graham, Hannibal couldn't see a series of clear, logical potential endings anymore. Instead it was all a blur, and while he should be doing all he could to avoid weakening and falling in deeper, Hannibal just kept walking straight for Will with his heart in his hands.

It was a concept which in the past would have struck him as utterly nonsensical: the way he felt with Will made him deeply uncomfortable, like digging his fingers into an open wound, yet all he wanted was more.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

How can I keep myself away when I'm falling on for you
I've never known this kind of love I
Can't help that I'm falling on for you
You won't say, you won't show
How you feel
How do you feel? - Ann Marr, "Bullet"

Later on, Hannibal texted Will goodnight with a series of kissing emojis but no attempt to initiate more seductive talk for now. Will was happy to take it slow and fell asleep still smiling.

He was burning himself some toast for breakfast the next morning when his phone vibrated with a new text, making his heart skip that same suspenseful beat that Hannibal seemed to control.

"May I request the pleasure of your company tomorrow evening for dinner and a movie? There is a French film festival screening at the art house theatre in town."

"I'd be delighted," Will sent back, daring to add a heart-eyes emoji. Who was he becoming?

He was turning into one of those doe-eyed, hapless saps in love, like the couples he sometimes saw walking around in public hand in hand or with arms slung around each other. Will used to wonder why couples like that looked as if they couldn't wait until they were alone to touch. It was an alien concept to him because most days, even eye contact was more than he could deal with. Now he understood.

He'd been conditioned to think of sex as just some fly-by-night whim occasionally and almost mercifully granted him if someone could stomach his personality long enough for a fuck. Yet Hannibal seemed to crave more of Will's conversation, as much as he liked to touch or kiss him. Will thought he might have to adjust some of his expectations about romance and worried that Hannibal was essentially going to ruin him for anyone else he might date in the future.

Hannibal picked Will up at his house on the appointed evening and rang the doorbell, standing there waiting with a long-stemmed red rose. The sight of this made Will blush from the tips of his ears to his toes.

"I'm not sure what, um," Will mumbled, caught between kissing Hannibal or hugging, so that he ended up giving him a weird side-hug paired with an awkward cheek kiss. "Sorry, that was not my smoothest moment."

With his free hand, Hannibal cupped Will's cheek and murmured, "I only wish you could see yourself as I see you, Will. Just once." He drew back with a reassuring smile, looking rather proud of himself as he added, gesturing with the rose, "And this is for you."

"Thank you, I'm uh…" he took the rose and nodded for Hannibal to follow as he went to the kitchen and sought out a glass for it. "I'm not used to this sort of thing. Flowers, and someone who rings the bell instead of beeping the horn."

"Perhaps I would very much like you to get used to it," Hannibal suggested.

Will glanced at him in momentary confusion. One of the reasons he was relieved that Hannibal also seemed content to take it slow physically was that he expected the man's interest in him to wane after they'd slept together. He wanted Hannibal so badly, and Will knew his own high sex drive all too well. So there was no doubt in his mind he would give in one of these days, but until then he'd hold off, bask in the glow of this idea they could be a real couple. After all, Hannibal was only looking for something casual, and Will had been down this road before with so many other lovers...so what if he'd never longed for anyone quite like this? It would all end the same. Will wasn't planning to get used to anything he was bound to lose.

This line of thinking had him distracted as he slid the rose into the glass half-filled with water. He caught his thumb on one of the long, spiky thorns and gasped.

"Here," Hannibal soothed, coming up behind him, "Let me." Attentively, he flicked his tongue once over the small droplet of blood on the pad of Will's thumb, then sucked, so softly, only for a moment, but enough to make Will's eyes roll back as a low moan escaped his lips.

"I think we'd best go now, or we'll be late for our dinner reservation," Hannibal smiled, licking his lips, and Will knew Hannibal was very much enjoying the sight of him overwhelmed, but what threw him for a loop was how much he liked it, too.

Dinner was at Elixir again, a curious choice in Will's opinion. While a creature of habit, Hannibal surely knew more than one restaurant between Wolf Trap and Baltimore that was "worthy" of his patronage. But Will's confusion faded when Caleb paused by their table again with a bright, amiable greeting.

"Good evening, Caleb," Hannibal said in the smuggest damn tone Will had ever heard him use, and that was really, truly saying something. "I think you remember Will."

Coincidentally, they were holding hands across the table, prompting Caleb's eyes to dart to their intertwined fingers. Hannibal lifted Will's hand to his lips and pressed a tender kiss to his knuckles as Will's eyes widened in surprise.

"Oh, of course," Caleb answered, looking embarrassed and disappointed in equal measure. "Happy to see you both back. Let me tell you about my specials tonight, I think you'll be pleased."

"I already am," Hannibal smiled condescendingly.

Will choked back a laugh once Caleb departed. "What the hell was that about? You're still dragging that poor bastard over the coals just because he gave me the once-over last time?"

"He was ogling you whilst you were very clearly here with me," Hannibal corrected him, lifting his wine glass to his nose, exceptionally pleased with himself. "Unpardonably rude on his part. I thought it only right to more overtly demonstrate that you are spoken for."

For now, at least. Until you get sick of me. Will tried to bury the thought under the sweetness of the here and now, plus the hilarity of Hannibal's possessive antics. Part of him was significantly more flattered and aroused than amused, and it was all very pleasantly distracting. He was still haunted by ghastly, blood-drenched dreams by night and worked to exhaustion by day, but now he had something else to think about that tasted a little too much like hope. He planned to savor it while he could.

The French film they went to after dinner seemed delightful, a masterfully acted romantic comedy with witty repartee to spare, but Will wasn't able to catch much of the plot. That was because about fifteen minutes into the movie, somewhere in the dark Will's eyes caught Hannibal's and he wondered how long Hannibal had been gazing at him instead of the screen. Will smiled and leaned over to place a light kiss on Hannibal's lips, fully intending to leave it at that and go back to watching the film. But then the feeling of Hannibal's warm, eager mouth left a sudden, indelible impression on his soul.

Will pulled back to stare up into Hannibal's eyes, flickering dark brown to black in the undulating shimmer from the film projector. His heart thudded with incessant need as his long lashes fluttered and he swallowed hard. Hannibal let him take the lead, resuming the kiss with slow tenderness, opening up finally into the sort of hot, tantalizing wantonness that was right on the edge of publicly indecent. Luckily none of the other filmgoers seemed to notice, or if they did, they didn't mind, because Will and Hannibal went right on kissing, long and deep and insatiable, for what seemed like ages.

When the movie was over, Will knew they couldn't have actually kissed for an hour and forty minutes. No, there had been time, occasionally, to stop and breathe with his head on Hannibal's shoulder, fingers playing together on the armrest until Hannibal would run a finger down the inside of Will's palm, tracing his lifeline, and they would be right back at it again.

"You don't have to keep doing this from now on, you know," Will said as Hannibal opened the passenger side door of the Bentley for him. "Driving all the way to Wolf Trap to pick me up and drive to Baltimore for our date, then back again, and back...you're going to wear yourself out. There's nothing much to do in Wolf Trap, so I should come to you. I'd come right from work if I didn't have to go home to put the dogs out."

"Firstly," Hannibal said, caging Will back against the car, as had become a fond habit, "It isn't nearly that easy to wear me out. And secondly, I'm happy to come and pick you up so that you can take it a little easier. I know how long your days have been of late, how grueling the cases at work. Thirdly, well...as for there being 'nothing much to do in Wolf Trap'...I beg to differ."

“Cute,” Will smirked, and Hannibal came in to steal a kiss just as excitedly as if it was the first time. “Very cute,” Will repeated with his lips still half smothered against Hannibal’s.

“That said, I would be remiss not to invite you back to my house for a night cap.”

“I, uh…” Will scratched the back of his head, fumbling around in his nearly insuperable lust for an excuse. If he went back to Hannibal’s house now, there was no way he would be able to help himself. They would definitely have sex...and then this would all be over. He remembered a song he used to like years ago, the lyrics something like “the talking leads to touching, and the touching leads to sex, and then there is no mystery left.” Would Hannibal still want him when the mystery between them was over?*

“Are you tired?” Hannibal asked gently, rubbing his shoulder. “Let me take you home.”

“Yes, please, that’s...thank you, I am a little tired. Maybe another time soon, though? I’ve been having such a good time with you, it’s meant a lot to me.”

“No need for the past tense, Will. Do you think you will lose me by wanting to wait?”

Even the most polite allusion to sex sounded like the most shockingly delicious thing imaginable in Hannibal’s voice.

Will's heart hurt, sore with wanting more than he could ever have. I don’t want to lose you by going too fast, either, he thought.

Will smiled uneasily, with too much teeth. The way he smiled when he lied to Jack that he was okay to be out in the field. “I didn’t think that, I know you care about me.”

“Very much indeed. How have the headaches been?”

“The same,” he admitted, “And I don’t think it’s the aftershave.”

It was Hannibal’s turn to smirk. He cupped Will’s face, seeing through to his inner turmoil, pain bleeding through another wan joke.

“Don’t be afraid, Will. Whatever it is that’s been ailing you, we’ll find the answer together. I’m still almost certain it’s overwork and complete exhaustion. Have you made an appointment with Dr. Du Maurier yet?”

“I was a little hesitant when you referred me to her,” Will admitted, climbing into the car. Hannibal closed the door with an intrigued nod, then got into the driver’s seat and started the engine. He turned the heat on, including a seat warmer that felt nice, making Will sink into the expensive leather with a soft yawn. “You told me she’s retired.”

“Bedelia only sees very select patients, but she owes me a great debt of gratitude, which would be reason enough for her to take you on. I’m sure she will consider it worthwhile in any case, to work with such a fascinating patient.”

“You also told me that she’s your psychiatrist.”

“Not anymore. I’m taking a break from my sessions with Bedelia, so that yours may begin. You need her more than I do at present.”

As Hannibal drove, Will sighed, “I don’t want to take your therapist away. There’s plenty of others I could see.”

“But you deserve only the best, and that is all that will satisfy me on the matter.”

“Bossy,” Will accused affectionately, curling up on his side as his heavy eyes began to close.

Hannibal leaned over to squeeze his knee as they paused at a red light. “Yes.”

Will drifted off to sleep without even realizing it, and when they got back to his house, Hannibal carried him inside, slid his shoes off and tucked him into bed. Will’s slumber was so deep that he didn’t stir back to consciousness even as Hannibal let the dogs out and eventually back in, then placed a note on the counter to let Will know he had done so. Hannibal sat down on the bed beside Will and placed a hand on his forehead, stroking under the sweaty mass of curls to confirm his temperature. As he suspected it was high, but not dangerously so.

Will’s pulse was fast under Hannibal’s calm fingers on his wrist, and his eyes, though clamped shut, were already darting to and fro, lost in a wild dream. No one had ever looked so beautiful, surely.

“If only you could see yourself through my eyes,” he murmured, leaving a kiss on Will’s damp brow. If only Will recognized the violent urges deep within his soul as the gorgeous inspirations they truly were, and how the parts of himself he feared the most inspired Hannibal’s rapt and awestruck admiration. Perhaps someday they could share it, share the savage pleasure of the hunt and soothe the ragged despair of Will’s self-denial.

For now, Hannibal contented himself with a small but significant theft: one of Will’s softly rumpled, plain white t-shirts, size small, well broken in and lying atop a laundry basket due for the wash. He kept bringing it to his nose and inhaling deeply on the drive home, intoxicated with the lingering scent of Will’s sickly-sweet perspiration and that appalling aftershave which had somehow become madly endearing.

When Hannibal walked into his own house, he could only manage his desperate impatience by the narrowest victory, making it to his bed before he stripped naked and rubbed Will’s shirt all over himself until it was covered with his cum.

He lay there staring up at the ceiling but still seeing stars, undone by the sharp profundity of his orgasm, which was beyond any he had experienced before. It was also the first time he’d pleasured himself while imagining anyone else being the one to dismantle his composure and make him cry out in helpless abandon.

This matter between himself and Will Graham was not to be trifled with. He struggled to get his breath back, to calm his raging heartbeat, but all he could think about were those kisses in the movie theatre, or the sight of Will’s lovely face asleep in his car, so trusting. Hannibal was losing a part of himself, ceding it over to Will without the slightest guarantee that it

would lead to anything but his own ruination. And still he couldn't seem to stop himself. As meticulous as his lifestyle was, he liked to tell himself that he was free to make decisions according to his mood and any opportunities which arose. Even with his murderous and cannibalistic proclivities, he knew he could stop if he so chose, without causing himself any serious distress.

Hannibal lay flat on his back, nearly paralyzed by the realization that he was addicted to Will Graham.

Chapter End Notes

*Will is thinking of the song "Portions for Foxes" by Rilo Kiley.

Chapter 6

Will wasn't sure what to make of Bedelia Du Maurier. She was like an eerily calm porcelain doll dispensing effortless wisdom, but there was an underlying tension to her every move, a quaver of subtle fear laced through her highly competent insights.

"Hannibal tells me you owe him a favor," Will mused as they sat face to face in her elegant home.

Bedelia's smile seemed like a vague facial twitch; there was no amusement beneath it. "Some time ago, I was attacked by a patient, and Hannibal helped me afterwards, to cope and recover. But we are not here to discuss my relationship with Hannibal Lecter, Will."

"Perhaps we're here to discuss my relationship with him," Will suggested with a wry laugh. "I'd probably like that better than talking about the other stuff."

"Such as the work you do, investigating serial killers and getting inside their wicked minds," Bedelia replied, her words unfurling with slow certainty. "The nightmares, sleepwalking, and waking hallucinations. Does being with Hannibal help you to manage those symptoms?"

"Being with Hannibal helps me to hope we're falling in love," Will pondered, surprising himself with how easy it was to open up to Bedelia. Then he supposed that must be because she seemed to hold all the answers, and he wanted to know them badly enough to be honest. "Wow, that's the first time I've said that out loud. Anyway, that potential happiness tends to make the problems in my life seem a little less bleak."

"You said that you *hope* you are falling in love, not that you are sure. And you used the word 'potential.'" Bedelia's brow lifted, gossamer-light."How will you manage the 'problems in your life' if the romance with Hannibal fails to fulfill your expectations?"

"I don't *expect*, Dr. Du Maurier, I cling to fragile and possibly ill-advised ambitions that in this life there could be a place for me to belong, someone to call home." He wished he could talk about this without worrying he was going to cry. It was probably a good idea, and productive, for him to be up front with Bedelia, but he really didn't want to cry in front of this impeccable, borderline haughty woman.

"You're afraid to let yourself believe Hannibal reciprocates your feelings of love."

Will let out a shaky breath. "I'm postponing a nearly inevitable disappointment."

"A nearly inevitable heartbreak," she corrected him. "But you box yourself into a corner with that line of thinking, Will. Why not discuss this with Hannibal and find out how he feels? You might be able to set your mind at ease, and that can only be healthy for your relationship."

"Maybe I like feeling trapped in doubt better than shadowboxing," Will fretted. "If he doesn't want what I want, God, I don't want to know. The way I've been feeling lately, with these

cases, this work? I don't know how I'd take it."

"But this cycle of doubt is inhibiting your full enjoyment of the time you share with Hannibal. I'm not telling you what to do, Will, but I do encourage you to consider transparency." Her smile, again, was unsettling, like she had merely learned to imitate human reactions, but Will supposed he shouldn't judge that. He'd been relying on his own collection of fake smiles to pass as normal among others for as far back as he could remember.

Although he couldn't imagine a scenario which would inspire Bedelia Du Maurier to embrace full transparency in her own life, Will nodded. "It's something to consider."

Hannibal slammed his hand down on the harpsichord keys with an aggravated groan. Nothing he tried to do today to fill the time productively and satisfy his usual expectations seemed to be working. Everything reminded him of Will and the discomfort he felt with continuing any of his former plans to tamper with the man's sanity, and yet he couldn't seem to produce a single drawing, nor musical composition that could come close to exemplifying his feelings. Was it impossible to create an ode to Will that would take away this yearning that kept gnawing at him from within, was that too much to ask? If he could capture Will's image on paper or release it into musical notes, perhaps the feelings would be purged and he could go back to his normal way of life, unthreatened by such weakness.

"Hannibal?" Will's voice piped up from the entrance to his study, knocking on the doorframe. "Sorry, the front door was open."

His blue eyes widened at the sight of Hannibal's distraught features, his red-rimmed eyes, flushed cheeks and fists crudely planted on the harpsichord lid he'd slammed shut in consternation. Hannibal stared at Will, standing there so innocently with a paper grocery bag in his hands, dressed in faded blue jeans and a soft flannel shirt. Will's brow furrowed in confusion as he glanced around the study and noticed the pile of crumpled-up paper on the desk, spilling haphazardly onto the floor.

"Will," Hannibal said stiffly, "I wasn't expecting you." He crossed the room to begin tidying his failed drawings as if ashamed, but Will set the bag down on the armchair and came to him, stilling his motion with a simple touch to his bared forearm.

Hannibal never let anyone see him like this, in a state of unkempt ennui, his shirt untucked, sleeves roughly pushed up to his elbows, hair falling freely across his eye.

"Hey, you don't have to clean that up right now. What's going on, are you okay?" The kindness in Will's voice was, to Hannibal, like a razor blade dipped in alcohol, slicing neatly into his heart.

"I'm perfectly fine," he sniffed, not knowing what to do with himself if he wasn't moving.

"Is that...do you smell something burning?" Will asked, looking over his shoulder in the direction of the kitchen.

“Yes,” he nodded, “That is why you found the door ajar, to let the smoke escape. No need to allow the fire alarm system to blare through the house as a further reminder of my apparent inability to bake a simple souffle.”

“Hey,” Will said again, gently, pulling him into a warm hug. “You’re in a crappy mood.”

Hannibal laughed, holding on to Will for dear life and allowing himself to take comfort in the embrace, setting him finally at ease. He smiled against Will’s curls and breathed him in.

“Yes,” he admitted.

“Like, a *really*, really crappy mood.” Will chuckled, massaging Hannibal’s back in slow circles. “I’m kind of relieved to know that happens sometimes. But listen, I’m sorry if I caught you at a bad time. I took a chance just dropping in on you like this, and I can go if you want.”

“Stay,” Hannibal entreated, drawing back to kiss Will’s forehead.

Will’s breath was as warm as his smile, so completely giving, even though Hannibal could see the dark shadows under his eyes. He hadn’t had a good night’s sleep in weeks, but he was here, concerned for Hannibal’s distress.

“You know, you don’t have to be brilliant every single day, Hannibal,” he said fondly.

“Why not? You are.”

“Yeah? Well, look what it’s doing to me.” A sadder smile now, and ghosts flickering across a deep blue gaze. “I’m falling apart.”

“You have the clarity of insight to be here picking me up when I’m down.” Hannibal frowned, realizing that Will did this without hesitation for everyone in his life, even for strangers.

Jack had him half-killing himself hunting maniacs; Alana toyed with his emotions and then threw him aside; Abigail rejected him as a surrogate father; still, Will remained steadfast, true, and caring. Hannibal didn’t want to be just like everyone else who took Will for granted or used him for his own selfish ends. There was no time to waste wondering why he suddenly had the capacity to see fault in his own reasoning; the need to be better than others was a built-in insecurity to which he had long been accustomed. But how could he possibly wriggle out of the seemingly doomed predicament he had gotten himself into with this irresistible man?

“Would you like me so much if I had no problems?” Will brushed Hannibal’s wayward hair back, tucking a longer lock behind his ear. “If there was nothing horrible about me?”

“Perish the thought,” Hannibal smiled, “But I can’t envision a version of you that would be anything less than sublime.”

“Aren’t you going to ask me what’s in the bag?” Will changed the subject, shrugging off the compliment as usual. Hannibal wanted to see him basking in the glow of unending adoration,

but he didn't know how they could get there from *here*, entrenched in necessary lies.

“I’m deeply curious.”

“Well, I thought that since you’ve been treating me to such amazing meals lately, maybe I could cook for you?” Will slid his hands up over Hannibal’s chest. “I’m not a terrible cook myself, when I can actually get myself to pay attention. And when I’m with you, I feel focused. So I brought over some ingredients…”

“That sounds perfect,” Hannibal grinned, “Thank you, Will.”

He led Will to the kitchen and gave a quick orientation to the amenities before leaving him to it, lingering by the island to ask questions about Will’s day and enjoy the sight of him organizing his recipe. Will’s beautiful hands were an inspiration as he carefully arranged the fresh trout on a baking dish, sprinkling herbs, garlic and lemon juice.

“You’re different on the days you aren’t in the field,” Hannibal observed. “Today, you seem at peace.”

“I had a session with Dr. Du Maurier.” Will started peeling potatoes and soon found Hannibal by his side, assisting.

They left a heap of russet curly cues on the cutting board, and began to slice the naked potatoes into pieces suitable for mashing. Hannibal knew Will’s small smile was an acknowledgement of how Hannibal silently intuited he was making mashed potatoes. It felt right to be like this together, side by side in the kitchen, the fulfillment of a dream Hannibal hadn’t realized he nurtured.

“After I’ve had a session with Bedelia, I always feel I have been left with a great deal to think about.”

Will set the potatoes to boil on the stove and came back to Hannibal, nodding and taking his hands with more confidence than usual. “That’s how I feel, too. Maybe it had me thinking about taking chances.”

“And hence, here you are,” Hannibal said, adding a soft kiss to Will’s mouth. “Do you know, I feel my mood lifting as if by magic. Your effect on me is a continual source of wonder.”

“The feeling is mutual.” Will pressed his forehead to Hannibal’s with a shy laugh. “I forgot to bring something for dessert, but why do I suspect…”

“I can easily whip us up some chocolate lava cakes,” Hannibal proposed, his sprightly pride in himself as a chef returning in full force. “And I’ve a sauvignon blanc that will pair splendidly with the trout.”

“I’m kind of glad it’s just you and me tonight,” Will murmured, clasping Hannibal’s face and brushing their mouths together, “It’s nice.”

“It is nice.” Hannibal let the words seep into his skin. “Perhaps after dinner we could…” He enjoyed the nervous expectation that flitted across Will’s face before he concluded, “Netflix

and chill."

"*Netflix and chill*?" Will repeated incredulously, "Where the hell did you come across that phrase?"

"Exactly how old do you think I am, Will?" Hannibal's eyes sparkled with amusement.

"Well, unless you lied on your Bumble profile, you're ten years my senior." Will ran a finger down the center of Hannibal's chest, leaving trails of fiery tingles in his wake.

"Your *senior*?" Hannibal tried his best to look annoyed, but he couldn't hold back a laugh. Grabbing Will firmly by his hips, he added, "Perhaps, in that case, I think you need to learn to respect your elders."

"Perhaps I think you should make me." Will raised his eyebrows and smiled with such utter mischief that Hannibal was half-hard at the sight.

He lost the thread of their playful comments and drew Will into a passionate kiss, delving his fingers deep into Will's curls with a small tug that made Will moan.

"Can I touch you here?" Hannibal muttered, cupping Will's ass tentatively.

"Yes, please." Will pressed his nails into Hannibal's back, increasing Hannibal's pleasure as they kissed again and he groped Will's behind in alternating squeezes and strokes. To Hannibal, Will felt...so perfect, made for him, pert but manly, rough but tender, his lips flavored with delicate, hectic fever, his instinct driving him to cling and moan in ways that drove Hannibal wonderfully wild.

"I think the potatoes are boiling over," Hannibal murmured a few minutes later, and Will smiled sheepishly, disconnecting himself from Hannibal with great effort.

"So stop distracting me," Will chided, turning the burner heat down to contain the roiling froth of starchy bubbles.

He leaned down to peer into the oven, checking on the main dish, while Hannibal enjoyed the delightful sight of him leaning over, sticking his ass out as if there would not be serious consequences. Sweet boy, always playing with fate, getting off on the thrill without even realizing what he was doing. So many of Will's most delicious urges currently lay in his subconscious, just begging for Hannibal to slowly, lovingly pull them out into their full, shameless glory.

"Should I?" Hannibal asked lightly, gathering silverware and napkins to set the table. "Stop distracting you, that is."

Will grinned as he glanced back at Hannibal, flicking a dish towel over one shoulder. "No."

Will wondered if he was ever going to make it all the way through a movie when he was watching with Hannibal. *We can always watch in installments,* he conceded with a smile,

watching the subtle naughtiness in Hannibal's otherwise serene profile on the couch beside him.

This time, he'd barely paid attention to the premise of the film at all, simply clicked the first title that was at the top of the new releases list and nestled in, hip to hip with Hannibal, who wrapped an arm around his shoulders as if he fully intended to pay attention to the tv screen. He didn't have Will fooled. Despite the luxurious leather couch, pretty rose-gold mood lighting from the lamps nearby and the enormous flat-screen tv which Hannibal probably rarely used (but if he was going to have something, it was going to be the best available version of it), Will could easily guess at his companion's real agenda.

"Uhh, Hannibal? Is there something you wanted to talk about?" Will inquired about twenty minutes in.

Hannibal, who had one hand down Will's shirt and the other latched to his thigh, kept looking at the tv as he smoothed his touch over Will's pectoral to graze a nipple. "What makes you ask that?"

"It's just that...I heard…" Will breathed sharply as Hannibal squeezed his nipple, then rhymically roved his fingers around it and repeated the motions. At the same time, he pressed down hard on the curve of Will's thigh, then gripped tight. Will's nipples were hard as rocks under Hannibal's exploration, bringing the faintest ghost of a smile to Hannibal's lips.

"I've heard that the third date is the most common time for a couple to have sex for the first time," Will reported, as academically as he could considering the way Hannibal's hand on his thigh moved slowly upward, two fingers stroking the outline of his hard cock through his jeans. "Is that…*oh!* Jesus, Hannibal, don't stop." He closed his eyes and swallowed, feeling all the blood in his body rushing straight to his thickening cock.

"I hadn't heard that," Hannibal answered calmly, fully cupping Will's clothed erection, only the blatant tenting of his own trousers to show how this affected him. "I did, however, catch wind of a rumor that 'Netflix and Chill' is a euphemism."

Will covered Hannibal's hand with his own, then moved it to the button of his jeans. He appreciated that Hannibal was using coy humor and teasing to make him comfortable, but he was far past the limits of his restraint by now.

"Shut the tv off," he demanded raggedly, and when Hannibal finally looked at him, Will's eyes were glazed with need but absolutely certain. "Take off my clothes and touch me."

Hannibal smiled and climbed over Will to gently remove his glasses and place them on the table. He turned the tv off and began unbuttoning Will's shirt, punctuating each opened button with a soft, wet kiss to the new swath of skin revealed. "Even lovelier than I imagined," he murmured, slipping the shirt back over Will's shoulders as Will moved easily to accommodate him.

"Lift your hips for me, Will."

Hannibal tugged Will's jeans and underwear down in one confident motion that left Will beet red in the face. His cock stood at bulging attention. "I'm so naked," he laughed with a hand pressed to his forehead.

"Beautiful," Hannibal sighed, running careful fingers up his legs, over his thighs, up his stomach and chest to trace his collarbone, then his shoulder-blades, taking entranced inventory of every detail he could observe. "Perfectly beautiful."

Hannibal kissed Will's lips, then moved to his ear, tugging it ever so slightly with his teeth and licking, his breath getting heavier as he mouthed up and down Will's neck, nibbling and sucking. All the while, Will gripped Hannibal's elbows, gasping as his hips automatically bucked up, his rigid dick seeking friction. "That feels so good," he sighed.

"Not nearly as good as it feels to put my mouth on you," Hannibal assured him, his eyes heavily lidded, his voice a purr. He kissed Will's biceps one at a time, then bit one a little harder, causing Will to cry out, breathy with surprise. "Too much?"

"No, I...I like it," Will sighed, shuddering as Hannibal licked down his forearm before he swept his tongue over Will's wrist and the frantic pulse it held. "Are...you going to lick everywhere on my whole body -- oh, *fuck*!"

Hannibal looked up at him with a sly, shameless smile as he went on circling his tongue over the tip of Will's dick. He licked a broad stripe all the way down to Will's balls, taking each carefully into his mouth with exacting sucks that had Will clutching at the couch cushions. "I-- you-- Hannibal, please...please."

His eyes were closed, lips open on a heady sigh. Hannibal took his cock in hand, then sucked up and down his length attentively. "Will," he said, licking at a pearly drop of precum, "Can you hear me?"

Will looked as if he was lost to an erotic trance, floating somewhere further than Hannibal could see. "Yes," he whispered, his fingers sinking into Hannibal's hair.

"You may be as rough with me as you like."

Will moaned and thrust into the hot, slick tightness of Hannibal's mouth, trying at first not to push too deep, but every stroke, every snap of his hips sent waves of startling pleasure through his body that were hard to resist. He managed to look down through his daze and saw Hannibal watching him, entirely committed to this act, happiness shining clear as could be in his pretty amber eyes. He was asking, silently, for more.

Will grabbed the back of his head, then thrust hard until the tip hit the back of Hannibal's throat, and Hannibal's only response was to widen his eyes and let out the smallest hint of a choking sound, then he exhaled sharply through his nose. He wanted *more*; he was euphoric, loving this. Hannibal grasped Will's ass, then ran a finger between the cheeks while Will thrust, groaning and gasping as the sensations within him tensed. The tight grip of Hannibal's lips, Will's cock sliding over his tongue to wreck his throat again, combined with the feeling of those strong hands squeezing and stroking, teasing his entrance, to make him explode. His

body arched further off the couch, his head tipping back as he gave a high pitched whimper, shaking with pleasure, his cum shooting straight down Hannibal's throat.

"There, now," Hannibal soothed, stroking Will's legs again with that comforting, gentle attention despite the fact that his voice had been rendered hoarse, his eyes still watering over. "Staying home is even nicer than going out together, isn't it?"

"Yes," Will smiled as Hannibal kissed his hand. He flopped back on the couch and released a heavy sigh. "I can't even begin to tell you how much I needed that."

"Believe me when I tell you, Will, I did, too." Hannibal sat back down beside him and stroked through his damp curls, easing tears of release from his cheeks, then licking his fingers of the salty moisture.

Will was sprawled haphazardly over the couch, one arm hanging over the top cushion, the other dangling listlessly, fingers trailing the floor. His pupils were hugely dilated, his lush lips parted on a sigh that dragged on luxuriously. Hannibal imagined that his lovely boy was probably extremely pliable in such a state, and he smiled as he leaned over Will and attentively stroked his face.

"How do you feel?" Hannibal asked softly.

"Overwhelmed...in the best way…" Will answered, his voice strange and flat though he smiled as if enraptured. Hannibal checked his pulse, which was even faster than usual, and pursed his lips in concern. "I'm okay, it's just...I feel kind of heavy and tired and tingly...this is...it's been a very long time since anyone has done that to me. And I wanna do that to you, too, so badly, I just..."

"You need to rest," Hannibal smiled. He didn't need reciprocation from Will right now to enjoy the encounter; he would be returning to the memory of tasting Will and making him come so hard it hurt, for the foreseeable future, savoring every tiny nuance he could recall, every fluctuation of that angelic face torn down to rampant sin.

"You don't have to drive me home, I'll be fine to...just give me a minute." Will's head lolled slightly.

"Come here," Hannibal insisted, unable to evict the smitten sadness in his heart at Will's assumptions. Will sighed and fell into his lap with heavy surrender, nestling his head into Hannibal's thigh, curling up and nuzzling his cheek against Hannibal repeatedly.

Running his fingers adoringly through Will's curls, Hannibal tsked, "You're to stay here with me tonight. I'll send a text asking Alana to look after your dogs."

"She's not...my on-call dog-sitter, what if she's busy?" Will murmured, clinging and snuggling at Hannibal's thigh.

"Then I'll find someone else. Do you trust me?"

“Yeah, I do. Thank you...” Will gave a huge yawn and fell asleep as rapidly as if someone switched off a light in his head.

After tugging a blanket down from atop the couch to smooth it over Will's shoulders and cover his lower body, Hannibal took up Will’s phone from the table beside the couch and sent the text to Alana as if it originated from Will himself. Only a few minutes later, Dr. Bloom sent back a reply claiming she’d be delighted to help out with the dogs. Hannibal was certain she would do nearly anything Will asked of late due to guilt of having grown so close to the man, only to reject him because he was unstable. He couldn’t fathom that others could look upon Will’s gloriously unhinged state and see anything but the most bewitching radiance.

Hannibal closed his eyes, not minding the awkward bend in his neck as he sat upright with about 160 pounds of disheveled, sweet-faced profiler lying half on top of him, pinning him in the uncomfortable, precious position. It would be easy enough to move once Will was deeper into his sleep pattern, but he was in no hurry. He went on stroking Will’s hair until his own hand went slack with slumber.

Chapter 7

“Mmfine,” Will mumbled into the fluffy pillow which had been placed between his face and the couch cushion. He yanked the two blankets covering his naked body even tighter around himself.

Gradually, he realized he smelled coffee and bacon, and that he wasn’t in his bed at home. He sat up, curls mussed and eyes softly tired, only to see Hannibal coming into the room with a tray full of steaming food.

“Hi,” he smiled shyly as a sultry flashback of the night before made him feel with disbelief the remarkable reality of this moment between them, the intimacy and domesticity.

Hannibal’s gentle smile in return, his cozy bathrobe and slippers, and his usual, pridefully pleased satisfaction in serving food. This was so lovely.

“Good morning.” Hannibal’s face was glowing as he placed the tray on a low table in front of the couch. “I hope you slept well.”

“Yes, well, somebody did *things* to my body that knocked me right out,” Will teased, lifting the mug of coffee and blowing on it, glancing down at himself to note again his sparse attire -- which only consisted of the two blankets. “Still so, so very much naked.”

“I hope you are not waiting for me to complain about the matter,” Hannibal smirked, wantonly appreciating the sight of Will’s chest and stomach left bare by the blankets wrapped loosely around his arms and spread over his lap. “I put your clothing from last night into the wash. It will be ready for you within the hour.”

“Thank you, and for breakfast,” Will said to the perfectly sliced and buttered triangle of toast he held to his lips. Okay, he’d need to leave in an hour, no problem. “So do you have to go into work soon?”

Hannibal sat down beside him and kissed his forehead. “I do not have any appointments until early evening. And your teaching schedule for today?”

“Full slate,” Will sighed dramatically, but something wicked sparkled in his eyes.

“A shame. I would have loved to spend the day together.”

“Where’s my phone?” Will asked, soon checking the texts from Alana to make sure the dogs had been tended to.

Hannibal’s slight deception in sending the messages from his phone while pretending to be Will seemed reasonable enough, since they couldn’t have anyone at the FBI knowing about their relationship. Will didn’t want to listen to the typical judgement that would doubtless descend from Jack Crawford’s throne on high, echoed through Alana’s overly rule-following attitude. He wasn’t used to admitting to himself that he found these people, who had

possessed so much power over his life and his perception of himself, annoying. Being around Hannibal was beginning to make Will learn to be honest with himself, and it came as a slowly evolving sense of relief.

As Hannibal watched, massaging Will's thigh, he called the FBI Academy and put on his best raspy voice accompanied by pathetic coughing. "This is Will Graham, I'm not going to be able to make my lecture today." Hannibal's fingers traipsed further up Will's naked thigh under the blanket and Will grinned, "Thank you very much, I'm hoping I'll be well enough to come in tomorrow."

"How shocking, Professor Graham," Hannibal noted, leaning in to kiss him with that special, conspiratorial look which always turned Will on. "You deceived them with such ease."

"A little lie never hurt anyone," Will retorted.

"That's true," Hannibal lied.

"I could use a shower." Will stood and offered his hand, beckoning, "Show me where it is?"

It was only a short journey down the hall and up the short staircase to the master bedroom with its adjoining bathroom. But it took them a while to get there, since every few steps, one of them would press the other against the wall for a sloppy, demanding kiss, and every time they stopped, Will would remove another article of Hannibal's clothing. First, the bathrobe, slipping to the shining hardwood floor in the hall as Will murmured, "So fucking cute" and got his hands deep into Hannibal's hair, kissing him hard.

"Are you *sure* you're real?" Will asked after taking off Hannibal's silky pajama shirt, which was like something Cary Grant would wear in a Hitchcock movie, debonair and sexily *mature*. He skimmed his fingers over the softest place in Hannibal's stomach, then up through the thick, greying hair on his firm pectorals, and traced his nipples until they stood out in hardened peaks. Hannibal's breathing stuttered the more Will touched him. "With my luck, maybe I hallucinated you."

"I want you to learn to trust your instincts, Will. I believe it's the only way you'll trust in me."

"Well, of course you would say something like that, you're not going to admit you're just a product of my unstable mind at its horniest. I mean, God, look at you…" Will shook his head. "I'm mostly kidding."

"I think the real point of the joke is that you never thought you would be here with me, that we could have each other like this. And you need me to prove to you it's real. Is that it, Will?"

"Yeah," Will nodded shakily, hands planted on Hannibal's shoulders. "I think that's it."

“Happy to oblige,” Hannibal said gruffly, lifting Will up into his arms as Will’s legs wrapped around him automatically, holding on tight.

Hannibal set him down on the bathroom floor and they brushed their teeth, another tricky task since they kept bumping into each other on purpose. Then Hannibal leaned into the shower to switch it on. Will got in and let the hot water cascade over his head for a moment before he smirked and called out, “Get in here.”

Water clung to his eyelashes and he blinked it insistently away when Hannibal came to him fully naked and hard, his cock bulging, flushed and beautiful, just as he had always fantasized it must be, just like every part of Hannibal was so beautiful.

“God, Hannibal,” he said roughly, grabbing him into a burning kiss, both of them getting wet and slick, their cocks brushing together, sending a shiver down Will’s spine that made him moan into Hannibal’s mouth.

“Allow me,” Hannibal reached for the shampoo, then washed Will’s hair attentively, making sure he moved at just the right moments every now and then for their erections to slide together, both throbbing at the slightest touch.

“You’re the devil,” Will accused, but two could play this game. He squeezed some shampoo into his own hands and soaped up Hannibal’s hair, then took his sweet time rubbing fingers through it, infusing the same scent of rosemary and cedar which now inhabited him, too. He was going to smell like Hannibal all day, in various ways that made his heart pound, hotter and faster, and he tipped Hannibal’s head back, rinsing, moving on to the loofah which he squeezed and stroked eagerly down the length of Hannibal’s body, enjoying every ragged moan which fell from those cultured, eloquent lips before Will had again reached a breaking point in his own patience.

He dropped to his knees and licked up and down Hannibal’s cock in a rhythmic motion that made Hannibal’s back hit the wall, his hand sinking into Will’s curls with a harsh twist. Oh, yes, how he’d wanted to do this during so many of their sessions, how the thought of Hannibal naked and in a state of complete weakness for him had added to his already considerable state of self-resenting confusion. But now he knew Hannibal wanted him too, really wanted him, and --

“Will,” Hannibal panted, thrusting his hips forward to plunge generously into the warm, wet tightness of his mouth, “I need...I need…” The words fell heedlessly along with the shuddering, messy jerks of his hips, but he slid out of Will’s mouth and with trembling hands pulled him back up to his feet so they were eye to eye. “You. In my bed, now. I need you.”

Hannibal’s accent had gotten so thick somehow that Will could barely make out the spaces between words, but it didn’t matter; they probably could have stopped speaking altogether and anticipated each other’s every desire at this point. He smiled, feeling finally completely ready for everything this would be. “Yes.”

There were condoms and lube in the bedside table drawer, and Hannibal placed them on the bed before he laid Will down, and all Will could think through the all-encompassing greedy lust and the savage slam of his heart overfilled with tenderness was *finally, finally, finally,*

And Hannibal was heavy on top of him, between Will's thighs, crushing him with blissful possessiveness that Will craved suddenly more than anything, to have Hannibal pressing into him, all around him, filling up every sense and every part of his being. He cradled Will's face and smiled down at him, their chests joined so tightly that they couldn't tell the difference between their thundering heartbeats.

"Hi," Will smiled up at him, and Hannibal nodded, then swallowed hard, his eyes lost and glazed by tears that made something so deep inside Will give a painful twinge. Love. He guessed he hadn't understood before, how it would actually feel to fall in love.

"Hello, Will," Hannibal said, his rumbling voice overwhelmed by fondness.

He kissed Will's mouth again, slow and searching, then paused only to flick open the bottle of lube and squeeze a sizable dollap into his palm, spreading it to his fingers.

His mouth returned, all over Will, sliding hot and demanding down his neck and biting hard, then licking and sucking the punctured skin while his hand dipped between Will's thighs to circle his hole and coat it in lube. The heavier Will's breathing became, the louder he moaned, Hannibal kissed him more and played his body as if it was an instrument designed for his every indulgent whim, a masterpiece in need of the right artist to bring its vital lushness into full color. He slid his index finger into Will so carefully, gradually allowing Will to absorb more of his big, strong digit, hissing at the feel of Will's body squeezing tight around him, but relaxing enough to welcome in a second finger, all while Hannibal kissed Will's lips, his cheeks and jaw, soothing Will's breathless pleas for more.

"So perfect," Hannibal smiled. "My Will. So sensitive…" He thrust his hand harder with an audible smack of skin, fucking into him with solid, quick motions that made Will quiver, grabbing at Hannibal's shoulders, insensible to anything but the shocks of pleasure and the thrill of letting Hannibal take him and do as he damn well pleased. Hannibal casually changed the tempo of his thrusts, teasing with longer strokes before he curved his fingers to nudge Will's prostate.

"Ahh-- aahh! Fuck," Will cried, "*Hannibal.*"

"*Mylimasis."*

Will didn't know what that meant, but it was pretty, and when Hannibal said it, it seemed that he had startled himself, admitted to something raw and a little scary.

"I can't believe you're so responsive." Hannibal's deep, melodious voice had never sounded so absolutely wicked. "It gives me all manner of ideas."

"Good," Will answered, dragging Hannibal into a tight embrace, hitching his legs up, wrapping his arms around his back, knowing he was being incredibly needy, and that it was okay to be like that, because Hannibal understood and he liked it, liked Will, so much--

Hannibal slid his cock between Will's cheeks, then teased him again and again, dragging the hard length against his own, and Will reached down, stroking Hannibal and trying to press him to his hole, get a little relief from this unbearable tension, this all-consuming want, but

then Hannibal's breath was so hot and labored on his face and he just wanted his kiss, as many times as he could get it.

He locked his ankles behind Hannibal's back, wrapped his arms around his neck and kissed until he was dizzy with Hannibal's taste, minty toothpaste and purely masculine heat, slick and delicious. Hannibal's cock kept bumping against his hole as he pressed his lips to Will's, treating him as he would someone indescribably precious. Will could almost imagine being that person, and he was afraid to let the thought progress any further.

Hannibal leaned back as Will loosened his hold, resting on the pillow with his eyes fluttering almost all the way closed. He could barely stand to look as Hannibal tore open the condom wrapper with his hair falling into his eyes, or as he rolled it onto his thick shaft, then slicked himself up with a low grunt of pleasure. Will felt he was watching a movie of someone else's life, someone else who would get to have this gorgeous, sophisticated, brilliant and kind-hearted man make love to them as if it was the only thing he ever wanted to do again. Was this him, was Will really here? He needed to believe it.

"Yes?" Hannibal murmured into Will's ear when he returned to his ready embrace, and Will nodded, hands clamped to Hannibal's warm, strong arms.

"Yes. Please, please, yes." He could only whisper, but it was enough.

Will's legs were high and widely spread as Hannibal lined himself up and pressed in with a slow but insistent thrust. Inside Will, Hannibal was startlingly big, enough that it burned and Will cried out in ecstatically intertwined pleasure and pain. Hannibal's only response to pushing in had been to catch his breath and stare down at Will in defenseless amazement, but now he drew back in slight concern, pulling out just long enough to add more lube, then glide back in.

"There now," Hannibal sighed, "Better?"

"Oh my God," Will moaned, groping his ass to push him in deeper, "Fuck me."

Hannibal reached under Will and took hold of his ass with both hands, hoisting it higher to thrust in further, muffled cries of delight filling their kisses. Will's nails dragged down Hannibal's back as his toes curled, and he earned himself a sound spanking as Hannibal pleasured him with fast, deep strokes.

"Yes, yes, ohhh," Will whimpered until Hannibal wanted to change positions, leveling him with a sinful glare before he arranged him face down and flat to the mattress.

"If you're going to make those sounds every time we do this, I'm going to have to show you what I think of your naughty little wiles."

When Hannibal thrust back in, it was so deep that it punched the breath from Will's lungs. He could feel that sexy little curve of Hannibal's hairy belly brushing against his ass, and goddamn, it drove him crazy. Hannibal's hand was tight on his low back, holding him in place as he fucked him hard, relentless, Hannibal's own breath so completely hectic, going on and and on until he let out a hoarse cry, coming into the condom, and Will wanted it gone,

wanted that hot splash of seed so fucking deep inside him and then dripping from his ass. His thoughts were dark, wild, alive, more alive than he'd felt in ages, in the months since returning to the field and losing himself, but he could feel himself now, all around Hannibal and alive.

"Will," Hannibal moaned, covering his back in kisses, rubbing his hands all over Will's sensitive skin. Every touch haunted him, ate away at his bones and inner tumult like a forest fire and the pain of that was agonizing, heavenly-sweet.

Will's eyes were closed, face pressed to one side atop the decadently extravagant duvet, lips curving around what seemed like hundreds of sighs, hips shoving slowly against the bed seeking release.

Hannibal disappeared for a moment, disposing of the condom, and when he came back Will was up on elbows, thrusting into the bedding, his ass immediately seized and spanked for the shameless behavior.

"You're mine," Hannibal said hotly against his neck, and then he was on his knees with Will's back against his chest and stomach, more lube coating his hand as he jerked Will with confident ease.

"Yours," Will repeated deliriously, bursting in thick currents that dribbled all over Hannibal's fingers, and Hannibal kept stroking, dragging the pleasure out longer than he thought was even possible, and he was never going to breathe again, he must be dying, and it was...he belonged to Hannibal, that's all he needed to know to feel alive.

"Mine, my Will, mylimasis," Hannibal exulted, moving in front of Will to lap up the salty excess of his orgasm, "All mine."

"All yours." Will pulled Hannibal to him and hugged him tightly, his heart lurching at the precarious emotion falling between them without a care for pride. He laughed when they fell back into bed, Hannibal spooning behind him, throwing a leg over Will's side, pressing kiss after heated kiss into his neck, petting at his hair.

"I'll tell you a secret," Will confided once they'd been lying there for a few minutes, their breath gradually slowing and evening out. Hannibal's skin was hot and wet with perspiration behind him, and that shower had been so fucking pointless. It was all like something out of a porno he wanted to keep on a repeated loop forever.

"I love secrets."

"When I was a kid, I had a crush on the Beast. First, it was the version from a big old book of fairy tales I borrowed from the school library. I loved the illustrations so much, I kept it and pretended it got lost."

"Oh?" Hannibal lifted his head just enough to crook a brow and smile slyly down at Will's profile.

“Yeah. And then one day I was home sick from school and I caught the really old version of Beauty and the Beast rerunning on tv. I was about twelve, I guess, and I just thought, that’s it. It was the black and white film, I think from the 1940’s, French, beautiful in this gauzy, dreamy way, lyrical. I thought that’s romance. And I didn’t want him to change, I didn’t want the Beast to turn back into some well-kempt, picture perfect, completely decent Prince, I thought he was so unbelievably gorgeous just exactly the way he was.”

“Although I’m not surprised to find we have compatible fairy tale crushes, I’m not sure what else to make of the allusion. I tend to be rather well-kempt myself most of the time. When you aren’t seducing me, that is.”

“Oh, right, when I’m not seducing you.” Will chuckled. “You innocent bystander, you. Well, I know you look polished and you show off your sartorial majesty every damn day, presenting the world the picture of the calm, benevolent, unflappable man, but that’s not what I see when I look at you. I see the storm underneath, in your eyes, in your heartbeat and the sound of your voice.”

“Whose secret are you telling?” Hannibal murmured, licking up along his ear and pressing one finger to Will’s lips.

Chapter 8

“Wow, I don’t know how to do this part,” Will laughed after they took another shower, getting only minimally carried away with kisses, and reemerged wearing matching towels around their waists. “The part where we slept together and yet I’m still here. You, wanting me to be more than just another notch in your belt.”

Hannibal, who had paused by the bed to strip the covers off for washing, stared daggers at him, but the anger wasn’t directed at Will.

“I wish you would give me the names of a few of the fools who treated you thus, so that I could personally let them know my thoughts on the subject.”

“Ha! I think that’d be taking it a tiny bit too far,” Will slipped into Hannibal’s bathrobe when the other man held it out. It felt nice against his skin, satiny and rich with the smell of Hannibal’s aftershave. The sleeves fell down to cover his fingertips, and he enjoyed how boxily it hung from his slighter frame.

“It looks much better on you than it ever did on me,” Hannibal observed, tossing on a cream-colored sweater with a pair of dark blue trousers, most likely the closest he ever got to wearing jeans. It was his casual, day-off attire.

“Don’t tempt me to loll around the house in this all day; I thought you wanted to go for a walk in the park.”

“There are an endless number of highly tempting options when we have several hours still left to spend as we like. I can admit that lolling around sounds rather enticing as well. But then again, I like the idea of taking your hand and walking through my neighborhood. And you could use the fresh air. You’ve already had enough exercise, but you cannot have too much of that.”

“Hmm, you do bring out my energetic side,” Will smirked, helping Hannibal to gather up the duvet, sheets and pillowcases, which they carried to the laundry room together.

“Hey, what’s this doing here?” Will asked once the machines were loaded and beginning to run with a low hum. He plucked up a familiar white shirt from the basket of freshly cleaned clothing on the floor, and Hannibal turned scarlet.

“I stole it,” Hannibal admitted. “For the same reason you stole the library book. I wanted a piece of romance to hold tightly to myself, a token of your presence if I couldn’t have you in my arms at night.”

Will’s brow creased. “Okay, but now that you washed it, it won’t smell as much like me anymore--” His eyes went huge as Hannibal’s blush darkened. “Wait a minute, unless you *had* to wash it because you…”

“I warned you, you bring out my most depraved instincts,” Hannibal reminded him.

“I’m so goddamn turned on right now that if we hadn’t *just* had sex…*Jesus*, Hannibal.” He cracked the shirt like a whip against Hannibal’s arm, only for Hannibal to grab the now notorious garment and use it to yank Will flush to his body.

“Obsession is a new experience for me.” He clasped Will’s face, caressing his jaw, the stubble softly prickly against his thumb. “I am still acclimating, still settling into acceptance. I fear that in giving into you, I will lose more and more of myself.”

“What are you going to lose?”

“My independence, my control over my own destiny. The careful sense of protectiveness over my emotions. If I show you all of me, I have no guarantee you won’t turn away, and if you don’t...I worry about how far I would always go to keep you close. How much of myself I’d risk for you. That I would do anything you asked without a moment’s hesitation. If we get any closer, I’ll be over the edge, and I’ve never been there before.”

“Is that, uh…is that why you were only looking for ‘Something Casual’ at first? What made you change your mind and decide to give into the risk, at least a little?” Will’s curiosity and his choice of words puzzled Hannibal.

“Something Casual? Whatever do you mean?”

“*Hann*ibal, that’s what it says on your dating profile, on Bumble. So all along, I thought, I mean I just assumed that while you liked me and enjoyed our time together, it would never be more than that--”

“Will Graham,” Hannibal said huskily. “Does this feel like something casual to you?”

“I guess not, I just...well, destiny does not usually deign to smile in my direction, to put it *very* lightly, so I was afraid to let myself feel how I felt.”

“I deleted the Bumble profile and removed the App from my phone the morning after our first date. If I wasn’t looking for a relationship before matching with you, almost as soon as it happened I realized I did want one. But only with you, mylimasis.”

“That’s Lithuanian, isn’t it? My...limasis?” Will sounded the word out.

“It means that you are special to me,” Hannibal confided, lifting Will’s hand and placing it on his heart. “The most special person in my life.”

Hannibal heard the tenderness in his own voice with a peculiar blend of horrified annoyance. Like everything else he had done with Will, he had intended the words to be a manipulation to draw his enemy even closer and twist Will’s mind to his own advantage, throw him off the scent of Hannibal’s true nature. But unfortunately, he knew now as he knew when they made love that he truly adored this man. Feelings he had previously thought himself incapable of exhibiting were spilling from his heart as if this was somehow remotely acceptable, as if he could risk humiliation, heartbreak, and rejection by allowing this to continue. As if Dr. Hannibal Lecter was an ordinary human being. The thought was repulsively inescapable, but underneath all that self-upbraiding, part of him was fearfully elated, living for every single

nuance of feeling in Will's beautiful face, every clever word that dropped from his lips and every moment of intimacy they shared. An addiction, indeed.

"You make me feel a world-upending variety of feelings, Will, but 'casual' is not one of them. I want you to know your own worth."

Will drew nearer and cupped Hannibal's cheek, eyes shining. "Most days I'm satisfied if I can just know who I am, without any confusion or reason to question it. Being *happy* with who I am is a bridge I've yet to cross. Maybe too many people over the years telling me I should change, be more normal, fit in...maybe too many stolen moments of quiet solitude, the only times it was okay to be weird. Hence the family of strays."

Hannibal kissed across Will's forehead reverently. "Your mind is extraordinary, your empathy and uniqueness traits to be treasured and proud of. I wish you would stop fearing yourself and start simply *seeing* what you want."

"I do see it," Will smiled, brushing his knuckles over Hannibal's elegant cheekbones, "I see it right now."

They went for a refreshing but bracing walk through the park, keeping a brisk pace because it was cold, snow crunching underfoot and their breath puffing in front of them, Will's arm securely slipped over Hannibal's.

"There's a wonderful cafe just across the park," Hannibal explained, "If you are hungry for lunch."

He was so pleased to be having this extra time with Will, trying to hide how much it meant to him because he was a hypocrite. He could try all he liked, but there was no keeping the happy pink tinge from his cheeks or the sincerity from his smile, the thrill it gave him to be out in his own neighborhood with Will, letting any passers-by see the new couple and know Will belonged to him.

But he belonged to Will in turn, more with every moment they shared. What was to be done about that?

He had essentially told Will he loved him, had laid out his heart for the taking, but he could not allow himself to be completely vulnerable. He regarded his own fear of the depth in his feeling to be a wise instinct towards self-preservation, but his emotions seemed to be out to get him where Will was concerned. Every word he spoke to Will, sweet words designed as lies, came out terrifyingly sincere.

To stave off his incomprehensibly large anxiety, he often thought of his careful plans, a means of ensuring himself he was far from defenseless despite his growing obsession with Will Graham.

His long-game plan was for Frederick Chilton to take the fall as the Chesapeake Ripper; he had painstakingly embedded the notion in Miriam Lass' mind for the express purpose of

being able to continue his enjoyable existence here in Baltimore while someone truly irritating took the blame for Hannibal's crimes. More recently, a wild card candidate for framing had emerged, a second potential fake Chesapeake Ripper: Abel Gideon. While there was a strong satisfaction to the idea of framing Chilton, who would never see it coming, and whose life would be ruined by the accusation and accompanying evidence, Hannibal resented Gideon's outrageous attempts to take responsibility for the Ripper's murders. He would use Gideon as needed, but only as a last resort. His natural inclination was to kill the man out of prideful spite and righteous punishment. A terrible thing, to have your identity taken away. Hannibal would decide who would take on the mantle of Chesapeake Ripper and why. He would have power over the public perception.

As a short-term plan, however, the chance remained that he would have to frame Will, send Will to prison, and the idea of this had become so horribly disturbing, he hated that it was still a distinct possibility. In order to prevent Will from immediately having Hannibal arrested once he learned the truth (and Will would *know*, would see, as soon as his mind was clear enough), Hannibal would have to have some recourse against the accusation. Then he would have time to convince Will that they were born partners, time to present the evidence against Chilton to the FBI at just the right moment to exonerate Will, hopefully welcome him into his own open arms. Through all of this, he knew he could lose Will too easily, through Will's possible, surface-level hatred and revulsion for what Hannibal was, through Will's deep-rooted fear of being institutionalized, losing the small but important creature comforts that made his simple life worth living. Losing his sense of self, and the public perception of it, becoming a madman just as Freddie Lounds had accused.

These times with Will were stolen from the hands of fate, and at the same time that he watched the play of gorgeously chaotic symptoms toying with that remarkable mind, the fun of "seeing what would happen" by letting Will go untreated was quickly fading into an aching desire to end the charade. The amusement of knowing he had a plan B in place if Will should discern his secret was null. He didn't want to get one over on Will, prove his superior intelligence, he just wanted every day to be exactly like this one, making love and laughing, sharing meals and memories, creating new ones and their own life together. Eventually, sharing in the hunt as well, kissing the blood from Will's lips after a fresh kill, keeping every secret between and for each other, not being split apart by oppositional ethics.

Companionable silence gave Hannibal plenty of time to think these matters over, but it brought him no closer to satisfaction or solution. Perhaps his own mind was far more clouded than Will's.

For lunch at the cafe, they had turkey sandwiches on wheat bread with farm-fresh vegetables, house-made hummus and dijon mustard. Hannibal found that he enjoyed the simple, wholesome choice, and their matching meals, as well as the way Will continued to allow him to order on his behalf. It was a measure of control which seemed to pleasure them both equally.

"I can't believe I'm this hungry again. You wore me out a little," Will accused quite merrily. "But this was great; I've always liked getting glimpses into your world. Today it feels much more real, intimate, like I'm a part of it."

“Because you are,” Hannibal smiled, caressing Will’s hand across the table as they enjoyed the serene midday people-watching through the wide window they sat by. “I think you should play hooky more often."

“You’re going to get me fired,” Will laughed.

“Fired from the job you fear, out of the influence of a supervisor who takes advantage of your kindness to render you depressed and ill, and then reprimands you when you’re either too worn down or too indignant to do his bidding with the expected efficiency?” Hannibal pursed his lips. “Forgive me, I didn’t intend to indulge in that rant.”

“It’s okay, look, I know it bothers you that I keep going out in the field when it’s taking such a toll on me. Maybe, through therapy, through taking better stock of my life, I can find a new sort of balance.” Will sat back and sighed, rubbing his chin in thought. “I’d like to find a way to consult on these cases without losing myself in the process. I don’t know if there *is* a way, but I can’t have these abilities and let people die because I wasn’t willing to use them.”

It was the guilt of liking what he saw a little too much that was tearing Will asunder, Hannibal knew. If he could give into the killer inside himself, he would be able to evaluate the murderous minds of others without such misery. He could save what lives he pleased, take what lives he deemed no longer worthy of sullying the world with indecency. Hannibal regarded Will’s sense of justice with the utmost, often erotic, fascination. He was incredibly aroused by the idea of Will enacting his vision of justice upon whomever he liked, the thought of Will as righteous executioner, how happy it would make them both. Someday. He had to believe they could have it, someday.

“I’m going to get one of those scones,” Will nodded at the bakery display under glass by the counter behind them. “Do you want one?”

“I’ll go and--” Hannibal reached for his wallet and Will laughed, placing a hand on his arm to stop him.

“Just this once, it’s my treat, money-bags. I’ll be right back.”

Will returned with two fragrant scones, buttery-flaky pastry bursting with bright, juicy fruit, and broke each one in half. “Now we can each try both flavors,” he grinned, and Hannibal looked down at the portions of cherry and blueberry biscuits on the small plate in front of him, more painful sentiment tugging his heartstrings with ruthless strength.

“I can’t seem to get enough of seeing you open and happy like this, Will. You’re a vision to behold.”

“Oh, stop.” Will chuckled, “I’m not used to being anything but a vision of rumpled confusion, an inconvenient unstable presence at the back of the room. You’re developing a major habit of spoiling me, Dr. Lecter.”

“You’re developing a distinct habit of liking it, unless my perceptions deceive me.” Hannibal smirked. “Does it really bother you so much, to let me buy you things, to allow me the delight of pampering you?”

Will rolled his eyes and blushed. “No. I actually like it a lot.” He scratched his neck, which probably wasn’t actually itchy, and his foot edged forward to nudge Hannibal’s under the table. “I didn’t know, before being with you, that all of *that* was a turn-on for me. I’d like you to know, however, that you don’t have to spoil me constantly. Sometimes you’re going to be the one who needs to be taken care of, and I can do that for you. I want to.”

“I suppose that’s what couples are supposed to do for one another,” Hannibal mused. “A novel concept for us both, to engage in such pedestrian forms of normalcy.”

“Yeah,” Will shrugged, gathering up their empty cups and plates, leaning across the table to kiss Hannibal’s cheek. “But I like that maybe best of all.”

“Since you have my t-shirt, mind if I keep something of yours to take home with me?” Will asked later, when they were standing in Hannibal’s driveway saying their goodbyes. “How about one of your ties? I think I could have some fun with that.”

“You do thrive on teasing me, even when I must force myself not to act upon it,” Hannibal accused, and Will snorted a laugh.

“Always.”

“I don’t want you to need keepsakes to feel me close to you, Will.” Hannibal hugged him tightly, and Will melted against him.

They were only parting for an evening, perhaps with another work day before they could potentially share their next date, but to Hannibal, Will’s departure felt more definitive. Every day that ended was another day closer to the inevitable, painful destruction of their closeness. He couldn’t stand to let go.

“Come back,” he urged, kissing Will’s lips, “Come back and stay. Or I can come to you, if you prefer.”

“Are you suggesting we move in together?”

"It seems that way," he smiled.

“Wow, that’s, uh--” Will’s cheeks were flushed from more than the cold. “That’s soon.”

“I apologize if perhaps I’m getting far too carried away.” Embarrassed, Hannibal ducked his face, but Will tipped his chin back up, nuzzling into his neck with warm kisses. He hummed, easily getting high again on Hannibal’s smell, the heat of his skin, his sudden flashes of unexpected reticence.

“Don’t run away from me because you’ve let yourself be honest about what you want. *You* taught me how to stop doing that, so listen to your own advice.” Will rubbed his nose into Hannibal’s neck, trying to remember what common sense was good for. “You’d really want that? I mean, what about the dogs? They have a lot of...fur and drool,” he laughed nervously, “And they bark sometimes. They’re well-behaved, of course, but there’s seven of them.”

“Bring them all, keep them here in my home, I don’t care.” Hannibal tugged on Will’s army green overcoat possessively, “Or if you’d have me, I could live with you in Wolf Trap.”

“You? Hannibal Lecter, tucked away in a little cabin in the woods, far from civilization, surrounded by dogs and with a neurotic disaster man as your only companion? Have you seen my kitchen? I think you’d find it distressingly basic.”

“If you would prefer we live in your house,” Hannibal affirmed, “I will give that to you, because your company is more than worth it to me. I would live with you anywhere...which is not to say I wouldn't plan a few home improvements soon afterwards." They both laughed, and he added, "I fear I’ve ventured out of bounds by proposing this change, so I’m letting the matter drop. We needn’t discuss cohabitation again unless you bring it up.” He unwound the tie from his neck, having changed into his usual dapper suit in preparation for work. “In the meantime, this is yours.”

Will glanced down at the print of impressionistic flowers set into the finest silk and wound the tie around his hand, holding it tightly. “Thanks. And I’ll think about it, Hannibal...your idea, that is. I’ll think about it a lot.”

Chapter 9

"Are you aware that whenever you are given positive verbal reinforcement, you tend to reply with a self-deprecating remark, unconvincingly layered with defensive humor?" Bedelia asked Will calmly at their next session, her pale hands clasped neat and still in her lap.

"Yes, thank you, I am aware of that. I'm trying to break the pattern, but…" Will trailed off, stretching and repositioning himself in the fussy velvet-backed chair, fidgeting as he often did when confronting uncomfortable truths. "I tend to want to get out ahead of other people when they see my various quirks in action. Rather than waiting to be told that I'm awkward and inappropriate, I tell *them* first, and it hurts a little less."

"What if you gave others the chance to decide for themselves who you are? This carries, of course, the responsibility you would place on yourself to craft an image of you to portray to the world. A person suit."

"A 'person suit'?" Will nearly spat the words. The immediate image that came into his mind was of a false, loose, sallow set of extra skin, a Will Graham costume for himself. "Forgive me, Dr. Du Maurier, but what the hell is that?"

"We all have one, Will," she smiled, and it was the first time he could see genuine emotion of any kind, a sort of smug amusement at his sassy response. "You can control the version of you which you allow others to see. You can decide who gets all of you, and who simply gets a surface-level Will Graham, one who can carry you through any given scenario without the need to denigrate yourself with painful jokes."

"I used to think no one could handle all of me, until I met Hannibal. I picture myself dating someone else, say, someone like Alana Bloom." He frowned, remembering how he used to think that would make sense. "I know that if we were out in public together, and I had an episode of whatever's been eating at me lately, or if I couldn't cope, if I was *strange* for whatever reason, she'd be ashamed to be seen with me. Oh, she'd hide it really well, but I'd know. For people like her, the affection she intends towards me with every good intention is interwoven with a condescending pity which sickens me to the core."

But Hannibal is proud to be seen with me, no matter how I act or look, he thinks I'm luminous. He bit back a smile. Therapy was going well, but he hated the continual feeling he was going to burst into tears and cry for at least a year.

"Not everyone is going to be like Jack Crawford or Alana Bloom," Bedelia reasoned. "What about Beverly Katz? Or even Abigail Hobbs? There are those, even in addition to Hannibal, to whom you feel potential kinship."

"Seems too good to be true," he sighed, rubbing his hands over his face. "But I guess it's still worth trying. Let them see a little more of the real me, and keep the person suit on for everyone else?"

"Again," Bedelia smiled icily, "It is something to consider."

“How is my tie faring?” Hannibal texted as Will walked into the FBI Academy and headed for his classroom, pausing in the hall to smile down at his phone.

Will laughed and sent back, “It’s in the wash.”

“*You’re* in a good mood,” Alana noticed, walking by on the way to her own lecture, and Will nodded, giving her the person suit.

“Morning, Alana. Have a good class.”

She quirked a brow, obviously confused by his mild reaction to her presence and quickly probing question. So Alana was being nosy and he wasn’t falling at her feet with eager answers anymore. Huh. This was kind of fun, and perhaps Bedelia actually had a point with this technique.

He walked off, leaving her just that simply, but stopped in his tracks when another text from Hannibal came through and he had to dart to one side to prevent lines of students behind him from bumping smack into him.

“I can’t wait to see you this evening,” Hannibal had replied, the text supplemented by an eggplant emoji, several droplets of water, and a heart-eyed face.

Will was almost certain Hannibal wasn’t talking about dinner.

“Me, too,” he sent back with his blushing face emoji, which only made Hannibal send him lines upon lines of kissy-faces.

He was still laughing softly when he came into his classroom and flicked on the light, immediately noticing an enormous gift basket sitting on top of his desk. It was piled high with everything from honeyed baklava to chocolate-covered cherries, myriad fresh fruit and gorgeous baby vegetables, wedges of luscious cheese and coils of delicately sliced artisan meats. There was also a large bottle of scotch, and interwoven through the whole assortment of treats were black and dark purple flowers, and this, this was absurd.

“Seriously?” He texted Hannibal.

“Do you like it?” Blushy-faced emoji. “I thought you deserved a treat for going back to work.”

“I took one day off! And...I love it.”

“Bring the scotch tonight.”

The classroom door creaked open and Brian Zeller came charging towards him with all his usual grace, which was to say none. He was half-absorbed in the file folder he held open in one hand, trying to read and walk at the same time, but he did a double-take when he saw the basket.

“Is that from Dr. Lecter?”

“Zeller. Why are you here?” Will blushed and put the basket under his desk, just barely able to fit the tall, unwieldy thing.

“Nice to see you too, Graham. Here, I brought you those autopsy reports you wanted.”

Will perused the file, realizing he’d wanted to stay focused on the fun in his life for once, and here he was, necessitated to dive back into the bloody fray. “Thanks.”

Zeller shrugged, obviously still distracted by other thoughts. “So, in the basket, is that Macallan scotch? Because that stuff is the best.”

“I guess." Of course it was the best, Will thought with a flicker of a smile. "Hey, how did you know it was from Lecter, by the way?”

“Who else would pick out something like *that*? It looks like Count Dracula wanting to impress his -- wait a minute, are you two dating?”

Will’s eyes widened. “Of course not, why would you think--”

Brian grinned as if he’d just won the lottery. “You are, you totally are, and Jimmy owes me and Beverly twenty dollars each. We knew you guys were flirting.”

“Look, you can’t tell anyone.”

“I mean, Beverly will be thrilled, she’s such a romantic, but she doesn’t want anyone to know. I can see it, but you know, she’s not really interested in my version of it, not that I’ve asked her, but she usually kind of treats me like her annoying big brother.”

“Zeller.” Will glared, his voice flat.

“Yeah, yeah,” Zeller waved him off, “I’m not going to spill the beans to anyone else, especially not Agent Crawford. Your personal life is your own business, and I can understand meeting someone at work, and they’re special enough that you kind of have to take that risk, even though you think maybe they’re way out of your league, and you turn into this idiotic babbling mess every time you try to talk to them, or even talk about them to somebody else--”

“We’re not talking about me and Dr. Lecter anymore,” Will noticed, and in spite of his attempts not to like Zeller, because the less people he liked, the less he had to deal with being an annoyance to them, he smiled, and the smile was warm.

“Maybe not,” Zeller admitted, lowering his voice as students started coming in and settling at their desks. “Can I ask your advice about something?”

“Um, okay?” Will adjusted his glasses and crossed his arms expectantly. Someone asking him for advice, but *not* about a dead body was kind of weird.

“How did you make it happen, how did you guys get together?”

“I did something that’s fundamentally unheard of in this day and age. I admitted to him that I was interested, not just in a fling but in something real,” Will determined, casting his mind back over recent memory to find accurate answers. “I stopped pretending not to care, stopped expecting to be treated badly, and...I put myself out there for him. I’m not sure there is another way to make it happen.”

“That’s a little scary,” Brian said with a shaky laugh. “I don’t know if I can put myself out there. Feels like laying down on a chopping block waiting for a guillotine blade to fall.”

“If you want my advice, it’s the only option you have: perilous honesty. You could, God forbid, just ask Beverly out. I have a feeling she’s far from opposed to the idea.”

“What? Did she say something to you?”

“She didn’t have to. I saw the way you two are around each other and I said something to *her*, I suggested she ask you out. Maybe you’ll listen? And now I kind of have to teach a class. See you later?”

“Uh, yup,” Brian nodded, “See you, man. And thanks for the talk, it really...I think it helped.”

That evening, Will had dinner at Hannibal’s house with Abigail Hobbs and Freddie Lounds. As the father figures in Abigail’s life, it was their job to get between this victimized young woman and the repugnant machinations of her would-be biographer.

Hannibal was gathering wine glasses to bring into the living room while Will searched through what seemed like a hundred exquisitely organized cabinets looking for the right cloth napkins to put out.

“Babe, where do you keep the silver napkins?” he called over his shoulder.

“Hey,” said a decidedly female and youthful voice. Mortified, he turned around to see Abigail, and only Abigail, standing there, smirking. “‘*Babe?*’”

Hannibal must have slipped into the other room without him noticing, and sent Abigail in to help Will. A transparent attempt to give the two of them a chance to bond, he realized, fond gratitude shading his embarrassment.

“I think they’re over here,” Will compensated, finally landing on the right stack of folded luxury linens.

“So, you and Hannibal are...a couple? You can tell me if you are; I know how to keep a secret.” Abigail's vivid blue eyes shone with more genuine interest than he’d seen her show in almost anything since they’d met. Once again, instead of shutting down when someone initiated a personal conversation, he felt inclined to open up, see what happened.

“I suppose...we are,” he ventured, “It’s a recent development.”

“Good for you,” she said thoughtfully, gathering silverware from a nearby drawer. “I know that you two think of me sort of like family. Maybe it makes sense that you’re together. You seem more like parents that way.”

“I’m sorry if I’ve overstepped, at any point along the way,” Will answered, worried by the way she kept getting put in the position of dealing with other people’s feelings about her. Even their attempts to protect her seemed burdensome, and that was the last thing he wanted. “You said that just because I killed your dad doesn’t mean I get to be him, and I want you to know I don’t expect you to see me as a dad.”

Abigail shrugged. “It’s all murky. Maybe it’s easier for me to accept Hannibal as a parental figure because he didn’t kill my dad. But in your shoes, he would have. He wouldn’t have had a choice, like you didn’t.” She chewed her lower lip. “I guess I can’t blame you for that forever. It’s too convenient.”

Will shrugged, feeling awkward but at the same time glad they finally had a chance to talk about all of this. “If there’s ever a way I can be there for you or help you out, that’s all I want. I don’t want you to feel you’re alone in the world, only surrounded by users.”

“You ever feel that way?”

Hannibal strolled in and shot them a serene smile. “Are you two intending to remain holed up in the kitchen all evening and leave me alone to deal with Miss Lounds? If so, I am here to beg for your mercy.”

Will laughed, then looked back at Abigail to answer her question. “I used to feel that way all the time, but not anymore.”

After dinner, Hannibal was alone with Abigail in the kitchen when she finally confessed her role in her father’s murders. As she told him about the way she found the girls for her father to kill, posed as their friend to lure them in, and continually acted out of terrified self-defensive instinct, Hannibal remained calm. He had no intention of spooking the girl with the sort of unfairly extreme reaction she might get from almost anyone else; this was a remarkable show of trust on her part. He would reward her accordingly.

“I wondered when you would tell me,” he said, understanding and soothing.

“Do you think I’m a monster?” Abigail said with a half-sob, as if she was so worn out with crying lately that it was all her body could manage.

She *was* a monster, of course, but he would not choose this moment to tell her so, especially since her question was rhetorical. Deep down, Abigail was intelligent enough to know exactly what she was, and how much of her father’s instincts she had inherited. He thought of the way Alana had called Abigail’s behavior cold and manipulative, but here was this girl, barely more than a teenager, soft and tear-streaked as he drew her into a hug and patted her head.

Monsters felt things, too, but outsiders could never understand that. It was why Abigail belonged here, with Hannibal and Will, who could give her the affection and guidance she needed.

“You are not a monster, Abigail. I know what monsters are. You’re a victim.” Hannibal felt the truth of the last statement. Was it so hard for others to understand that one could be a monster and a victim, or that fighting one’s true nature as Will did was only a damaging, doomed battle? "And Will and I, we're going to protect you."

As if summoned by Hannibal’s thoughts, Will entered the room and regarded them silently for only a few moments before Abigail reached out her hand, wanting him to join them. Will came into the hug with a contented sigh, holding onto both of them as if doing this gave him a new strength, a fragile hope confirmed. Tonight, it felt like they were becoming a family.

“What are you doing?” Hannibal inquired a few hours later when they were alone in his room. He climbed into bed with Will, nodding at the computer in his lap.

“Oh, just finishing up my lecture notes for tomorrow, nothing too scintillating,” Will answered, still looking at the screen. He had to stay focused on the task at hand because if he looked over at Hannibal right now, he’d be easily tempted away. “I’ll be done soon.”

Will could feel Hannibal’s gaze flicking over his same old white t-shirt and plaid boxers combination, and a wave of anticipatory arousal took him over. He wriggled his toes and licked his lips. “Hannibal, stop that.”

“I cannot imagine what you mean,” Hannibal answered in his most innocent voice. He took up his notebook, which he seemed to read almost as often as he wrote in it. Will wondered if it was Hannibal’s journal and would have loved to get a peek, but he didn’t want to pry. Lifting the small, leather-bound book casually over his face, Hannibal rested on his back, his head perched innocuously on Will’s thigh, and they continued like that for a few minutes without further incident.

Eventually, Hannibal turned over on his side and began to nuzzle his face into Will’s leg, pressing softly lingering kisses all the way from his thighs to his ankles and back again, humming in satisfaction as Will’s breath quickened.

“What are you doing?” Will sighed, melting into Hannibal’s kisses but leveling him with an accusing look. “I’m trying to get this done so that we can do exactly what you’re trying to start-- ohhh…”

He closed the laptop lid and held it aloft like a half-hearted shield, swallowing hard as Hannibal moved up to his stomach, lifting his shirt to bite delicately at Will’s low belly. “Come on, you’re not being fair,” Will pleaded, and his hardening cock twitched as Hannibal gently rubbed it through his boxers. “Okay, maybe ‘fair’ is overrated.”

He went to remove his glasses, but Hannibal sat up and stopped him. “Leave those on, please. Professor,” he instructed with a devilish smile.

“Um. Why?”

“Because I’m very worried about my grade in your class,” Hannibal murmured, placing the laptop aside before he peeled off Will’s shirt and leaned in to lick his nipples. “I’ve been so neglectful of my studies, Professor Graham.”

As Hannibal swirled his tongue around each of Will’s nipples and sucked, Will’s fingers fell into his hair and he gasped, baffled and more turned on by the second. “What?”

“I’ve been skipping class…” Hannibal continued, stripping Will of his boxers, then sitting back to remove his own pajamas, making Will’s mouth water at the sight of him, strong, fully erect and all Will’s. He returned to mouth messily at Will’s abdomen, alternating kisses with unpredictably firm bites and highly suggestive licking. As he palmed Will’s cock, then ran his thumb over the tip, he added, “The assignments I’ve completed haven’t been up to the standard you expect of your students, and I know that. I’m only hopeful there may be some way for me to redeem myself.”

“You mean...like extra credit?” Will asked between moans as Hannibal spread his thighs and bit each of them lovingly, “I don’t usually give extra credit.”

“Perhaps you could make an exception for me, if I show you how serious I am. I’m committed to showing you what I can do in this class,” Hannibal smiled, licking up Will’s cock much too tentatively.

Will knew he should feel silly, lying there naked with his glasses on, but instead he felt beautiful and special. It couldn’t have been more obvious how much Hannibal loved the sight of him just like this, and was enjoying the naughty game he’d initiated.

“I think you’d better demonstrate,” Will suggested, petting through Hannibal’s hair, trying and failing to control the shaking in his legs.

Hannibal held him still and swallowed his cock down as Will cried out in helpless abandon. “Fuck! Oh my God, Hannibal, please…”

“Hmm,” Hannibal mused, returning to his more gradual attentions, slicking Will up with saliva and precum, lapping at his hot, rigid length before sucking the tip and repeating the rhythmic pattern. Will needed more, and he knew it, Hannibal knew it and he was teasing him so--

Expertly, Hannibal’s free hand shot out to the bedside table drawer where he procured the lube, barely looking up from between Will’s thighs. He rubbed a lubricated finger around Will’s hole as he resumed his oral attentions to his dick, taking a moment every now and again to get his breath back and add another salacious comment.

“Every student at the Academy wants to be in your class, Professor.” Hannibal slid a finger inside Will, and his fingers were so thick, long and powerful. Will’s back arched and he moaned again. He was going to die right here in this bed if Hannibal didn’t stop all the endless build-up and just fuck him already.

“Hannibal, come on,” he panted, but to no avail.

“I know how lucky I am,” Hannibal continued, thrusting in with a second finger as he continued to stroke Will’s cock. “There’s a wait list. All the students want to learn from you, and every single one of us has a raging crush on you as well. The handsomest professor, the most brilliant. How can I help it? I hope you’re not offended.”

“Jesus *fucking* Christ, Hannibal--” Will’s body was tense, sweat-streaked and painfully needy.

Hannibal withdrew his fingers and smiled, “Turn over for me, please, Professor. I want to show you what else I can do to earn a better grade.”

Will did as he was told and went up on his knees, presenting himself wantonly. He grabbed at the pillow under his hot red face when he felt Hannibal’s tongue beginning to prod and poke at his asshole. “Oh, God! Are you really going to--” He almost scrambled up the bed, but Hannibal held him still.

“Hasn’t anyone done this for you before, Professor?” Hannibal spread Will’s cheeks and licked between them, rapturous. “I would love for you to feel it. Will you let me?”

“Oh-okay,” Will managed to rasp out.

Hannibal licked again, broad and soft against Will’s hole before he slowly began to open him further, sighing delightedly, tongue-fucking Will eagerly as Will disintegrated into gasps and cries of elated, slightly embarrassed pleasure, but after a while even his self-consciousness was defeated by Hannibal’s indefatigable hunger for his body.

“Mmm,” he sighed, feeling the sensations building faster and hotter inside him, and he never knew it was even possible to come just from this, but -- it was happening, and -- “Hannibal, don’t stop, God I’m gonna--”

Hannibal stopped, right at the very moment when Will’s pleasure was about to peak, and Will let out a horrified mewl. “Why, what are you doing?” he asked again, now definitely certain Hannibal must be trying to kill him.

Hannibal turned Will over onto his back again and hovered over his face, wickedly intent. “Do you like to be edged, Professor?”

“I don’t know, I think it-- I think it hurts too much,” Will bit out.

“Will,” Hannibal sighed, stroking through his curls as he dropped the game for a moment, “No one else has done this for you either?” He plucked the glasses from his face and placed them on the table. His gaze on Will was burning, a flinch of anger towards Will's past lovers which he could not conceal.

Will thought the simple fact of Hannibal’s bitter resentment for everyone who had ever fucked Will in the past was the sexiest thing he had ever seen, and he felt his entrance automatically squeezing again, begging for more attention as his cock grew even thicker. He shook his head.

“I think you’ll love the way it feels, if you let me continue. If you trust me, I can make it so good for you, mylimasis. Can you put yourself in my hands, Will?”

“We can try it,” he nodded, trembling.

Hannibal put on a condom and slathered himself with lube, then pressed carefully into Will as Will tried to accommodate him despite the continuing tremors wracking his body. “You feel utterly perfect,” Hannibal sighed, sliding all the way to the hilt as he leaned down to kiss Will’s lips. And that should be wrong, because Hannibal’s mouth still tasted of Will, musky, strange and...and somehow that was so fucking hot, and it only took a little more of this, with Hannibal’s tongue thrusting into his mouth, matching the rhythm of his cock as he rode Will. Just a few more slick glides of Hannibal inside him, Will’s dick trapped between them and tingling from the friction, and he felt the pleasure ratcheting again, all too obvious from the rising pitch of his moans.

“Hold on for me, darling,” Hannibal sighed against Will’s forehead as he slowed his movements, sabotaging the orgasm he’d so nearly summoned. He paused long enough to achieve his goal and Will clung to him, almost sobbing. “It will be worth it, if you can wait just a little longer.”

Will nodded,”It hurts, and it’s so, so good. I trust you.” He lay back with his eyes rolling up, panting almost as if he was going into a panic attack, but his face was painted with delirious joy, and Hannibal knew that he was floating away again, into his own world, completely shapeable to Hannibal’s every wicked whim.

He took Will to the brink of orgasm again, this time pressing Will harshly, belly down, to the mattress and punishing him with brutal thrusts, fast and deep, and Will simply lay there, palms flat to the bedding, only letting out a series of throaty grunts that quickly changed to a deeper groan, “So close--”

“Not yet,” Hannibal said, and he could hear the savage excitement in his own voice, felt the joy of this encounter and the bond between them deepening, and when he rolled Will over again, Will was very far away. Every small touch of Hannibal’s fingers and lips had him shaking, hips bucking as more precum oozed from the tip of his cock. Will had never been so responsive, and he was a very sensitive boy. Hannibal couldn’t resist anymore, couldn’t hold back from chasing his own pleasure, but Will took him by surprise as he was lining himself up to his entrance again, Will’s knees bent and pressed to his chest.

“I see you,” Will gasped, but he didn’t seem to be looking at anything in the waking world; his eyes were glazed, wet and darting everywhere, without focus. “My ravenstag.” He reached for Hannibal, fingers pushing painfully into his bicep, Will’s other hand clamping to Hannibal’s chest, gripping just as sharply around the skin covering his heart. “I can see you, my beast.”

Hannibal’s heart seemed to stop under Will’s grip and his breath stuttered as he stared down into that beautiful, lost face. “What?”

“Show me all of you,” Will ordered, and he rolled up his hips as Hannibal thrust back inside him, both of them moaning raggedly.

Hannibal placed one of Will's legs over his shoulder, took hold of Will's throat with ruthless intent, and laid siege to his gorgeous, exhausted body, fucking him with solid aggression until they both burst, hot white and gushing, hands clamped to each other's bodies with bruising force.

Will was silent as he came, just a wide open mouth and a shockwave that rocked him from head to toe. Hannibal released his throat and stayed there inside him as long as possible, caressing Will's face and kissing all over it. "Such a good boy for me, Will. Did you like that?" He was breathing so harshly he could barely speak, but he longed to know where Will's mind was.

"Oh, yes," Will smiled strangely, listless. He seemed to be without bones, lying there allowing the little earthquakes to keep tweaking his senses, savoring each moment from his place above or inside the core of the world, the dark and twisted forest of his soul where he normally feared to wander.

"You should do exactly as you like. Everything you dream about, all of the visions that make you think of yourself as an unstable threat to society, let them all out. Let me see you as you were truly meant to be, Will." Hannibal whispered into his ear and Will said nothing, just kept up those short, sharp breaths.

Hannibal knew it was highly unlikely that Will would remember his last few visions or what he had said before orgasming, and part of him was disappointed, despite the danger that would accompany the memories. When he was that deep inside his darkest impulses, Will could truly see Hannibal, and he wasn't afraid; he only wanted to see more.

Finally, he had to separate himself from the slick grip of Will, and it hurt to end this revealing moment between them. When he returned from the bathroom, he found Will curled up on his side. Lazily, Hannibal mopped up the sticky-sweet mess from Will's stomach and tossed the wet cloth into a nearby laundry basket, for once not really caring if it landed properly. With a heavy-limbed sigh of his own exhaustion, Hannibal lay behind him and wrapped an arm around Will's overheated torso. They had so much to talk about, but Will was already asleep, heartbeat throbbing relentlessly under Hannibal's roving fingers. "Goodnight, dear one," he murmured, kissing into Will's neck, wondering how often Will had seen this stag in his nightmares and feeling singularly honored at the thought.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal seemed to regard their secrecy in the workplace with minimal concern, but it was still a priority for Will. This was despite the fact that the list of those who knew about their relationship seemed to keep bloating with time. Zeller knew, so obviously Price did, too, since they were joined at the brain.

Beverly had sent Will a text yesterday claiming he'd been "holding out on her," following up with three fire emojis and "Dr. Sexy??"

Abigail knew, but he was glad about that. Bedelia Du Maurier had known from the onset of their sessions, but at least she was sworn to confidentiality.

And they might actually have been okay at the FBI, if it hadn't been for a fateful, rather catastrophic choice of wardrobe on Will's part.

Hannibal dropped by the Academy to bring Will a homemade lunch as he often did these days, and Will lifted his head from his folded arms where he sat half-asleep at his desk in an abandoned, between-classes room. "Oh, hey, babe."

His sleepy smile felt sweet on his lips as his eyes naturally lit up at the sight of Hannibal in all his fancy-suited glory, an insulated lunch bag hanging from his fingers with more elegance than one generally displayed whilst holding an insulated lunch bag. No matter what he did, Hannibal was so overly attractive that he seemed to Will like an eighth world wonder, a magically exquisite being with little place in the often blandly disappointing real world. But then Hannibal would go off on some long tangent about the historical significance of a certain breed of chicken when distilled into a soup, or why he only composed on the harpsichord or theremin, and there was his ridiculous, adorable lover again, uniquely dorky and one hundred percent human. Will loved to listen to him.

At the moment, however, Hannibal seemed struck silent. He paused as the smile of greeting faded from his face, his eyes locked on Will as if mesmerized and very much offended at the same time.

"Is something wrong?" Will asked, brow furrowed. "Is there something on my face?" He envisioned having taught a forty-five minute class with remnants of his breakfast sandwich stuck to the corners of his mouth, but a quick brush of his fingers revealed no such crisis. "In my teeth?" He ran his tongue over them in search of any damning pieces of spinach, confused because he *had* flossed.

"What in heaven's name are you wearing?" Hannibal demanded, a layer of grit in his rumbling voice that sent icy-hot shivers down Will's spine.

He glanced down at his hunter-green henley with its low, open neckline. “This? Not exactly my usual work attire, but I was really overheated again this morning. I think I would have suffocated in a shirt-and-tie. I did throw a jacket over it originally but then I couldn’t stand that, either.” He nodded at the brown tweed blazer slung over the back of his chair and Hannibal’s eyes widened in consternation.

“How can you do this to me?” Hannibal asked, and finally a ghost of a smile shimmered as he came closer and set the lunch bag down on Will’s desk.

Will grinned. “You have a thing for cheap long-sleeved undershirts from Target?”

“Don’t pretend innocence with me, you impossibly naughty boy,” Hannibal accused, practically yanking Will from his chair and slamming him against the wall where the projector usually shone.

Will let out a shocked breath followed by a low moan when Hannibal immediately pressed him hard into the wall and laid siege to the fully exposed column of his neck with his wicked, insatiable mouth.

“The way you *look*...Your *neck*,” Hannibal gasped, following a wet and thorough kiss with a savage bite that broke the skin.

Will grabbed tight to the back of Hannibal’s royal blue shirt and yelped. He felt a small part of himself being drained and sucked like a five star meal and realized Hannibal had bitten him hard enough to draw blood, and now he was *lapping it up*, then applying fierce suction, which fucking hurt and burned and made him feel faint, and this was wildly wrong and Will never ever wanted it to stop--

A funny old suspicion reappeared like a fog misting in one corner of Will’s mind, but he pushed it away again, his eyelashes fluttering as his heart staggered. He flashed back to the night in his kitchen and the feeling of Hannibal’s lips locked around his bleeding finger. If he leaned into the question, it would only be more decadently arousing, because he knew it couldn’t be true -- but he didn’t want to dwell on absurdities. It was true that Hannibal was a former surgeon, and that he seemed to have an unusually intense taste for Will’s flesh, but those were just coincidences and the man he loved wasn’t capable of hurting a soul -- unless it was Will, of course, for the sake of purest pleasure. Certain sexually sadistic proclivities shouldn’t be marked as traits automatically indicative of criminal mentality or sociopathic tenden--

“Hannibal, you’re going to leave a million marks on my skin,” Will made himself say, grasping at Hannibal’s shoulders in a vain effort to push him back, vain most of all because it was pathetically half-hearted. In the end, he ended up using his hold on Hannibal to shove him deeper into his neck. Will closed his eyes and tipped his face up, moaning, “This is the worst place in the world to do this…”

Hannibal murmured a slick, careless “Yes” in response, covering the other side of Will’s neck with what would soon be enough hickeys to be suitable for a high schooler showing up to school the morning after prom. They were too old for this sort of recklessness, to be consumed by each other’s desire so much that nothing else mattered, not consequences, not

even reality. Will dug a hand into Hannibal's hair, ruining the slicked-back styling of it as he heaved Hannibal to him for a kiss, their lips smashed together and opening for a fiercely sloppy tangle of tongues.

"Fuck," he muttered, untucking Hannibal's shirt as the other man's hands wandered under the henley to grope up his stomach and across his chest.

Perhaps it was entirely understandable that neither of them heard the door open behind them.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Alana groaned, causing Will and Hannibal to draw back from their kiss. "Hannibal Lecter!"

She looked like a disappointed kindergarten teacher, hands on her hips and moral indignation written across her scowl.

"Good afternoon, Alana," said Hannibal, still a bit flushed, his lips swollen, but otherwise calm.

Alana charged at them as Will adjusted his crooked glasses and pulled his shirt back down. His back ached from being pinned to the wall, his lower lip throbbed with a shining, tiny new cut, and from the pain radiating in his neck, he knew his skin was soon to be an obvious patchwork of claiming bruises. He felt so *good* all over that he couldn't quite seem to access the worry he should be feeling.

He tried to focus on Alana's anger and summon an appropriate response. "We can explain," he said, which was at least a second-grade level reply.

"Have you lost all sense of professionalism?" Alana glared at Hannibal as if Will wasn't even in the room. "He's your patient."

"I'm not his patient anymore. And I'm also standing right here," Will said. "Oh! And lest we forget, you kissed me, too."

Alana rolled her eyes. "And then I stopped it. Which was the right thing to do. Besides, all it takes is one look at the two of you to see this is much more than just a kiss. Isn't it?"

Hannibal's smile was delightfully smug. "Again your deductive skills do you credit, Alana. Are you feeling a bit jealous, perhaps? Only I can't quite determine in what direction. If flirting with your professional associates was an Olympic sport, you would be a gold medal winner."

Alana ignored the accusation and crossed her arms. "You can tell Jack, or I can tell Jack."

Half an hour later, Will, Hannibal and Alana sat in a row in front of Jack's desk. Jack looked discerningly at each of their faces in turn; Will's awkward grimace, Alana's smoldering irritation, Hannibal's exceptionally cheerful mood. Will was wearing his jacket again, which at least hid the bandaid on the side of his neck, but he wasn't sure that would do much good.

“What exactly is this about?” Jack inquired, seeming tired already, his fingers perched in a triangle under his chin.

Will cleared his throat. Hell if he was going to let Alana lob accusations at them instead of speaking for himself. “A relationship like ours doesn’t work without complete transparency, Jack. So in the interest of maintaining clarity between us, I’m here to tell you that Hannibal and I are dating.”

Alana maintained a steely calm as Hannibal smiled like the Cheshire cat and Will gulped. Jack’s eyes flashed as he sat up straight.

“You’re dating,” Jack repeated with a sarcastic smile. “And how did either one of you think this was a remotely appropriate decision?”

“It wasn’t appropriate,” Hannibal allowed, “and that’s why we’re here before you, informing you that Will is no longer my patient, due to our personal connection. It’s an obvious conflict of interest.”

Jack nodded, “Obviously. Yes, obviously. Have you both lost your minds, or just your professional integrity?”

Hannibal picked up on the thread of Will’s previous metaphorical thought tangent. “I have the distinct impression we’ve been called into the principal’s office under threat of expulsion.”

“Stop,” Will barely managed to smother a laugh, sliding his foot automatically against Hannibal’s.

Jack’s eyes flew to their feet as he slammed a hand down on his desk. “Are you playing footsie in my office? ARE YOU PLAYING FOOTSIE, IN MY OFFICE?”

“Sorry,” Will winced.

Jack pointed a finger at Alana. “You get him another therapist, someone who can handle him and keep his head on straight. See if you can find one he hasn’t kissed, that ought to be a challenge.” Will guessed Alana must have confessed to Jack about their one brief encounter.

Hannibal’s patience finally snapped. “Jack, if you continue speaking of Will as if he is not in the room, and maintaining such a rudely presumptuous manner about him, as if his brain is your property but the rest of his health a mere inconvenience, I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to find someone else’s shoulder to cry on when you’re in personal crisis yourself.”

Will stood and shook his head. “I already have a new therapist, not that it’s honestly any of your business. If you want me to consult on a crime scene, Jack, you call me.” He wondered why it had taken him so long to put this bluntly into words. “If you want to judge my personal life or whine about my supposed instability while you constantly put me in the position of feeling unstable, then fu--”

“Will, I think that’s quite sufficient,” Hannibal murmured, patting his arm.

“I hope I didn’t hear any of that,” Jack proclaimed, simmering in aggravation. “Now you two, get out of my office and find some way to cool down. Stop acting like you’re posing for a Harlequin cover and get your head back into a professional place before I write you both up for misconduct.”

“Hannibal doesn’t actually work--” Will and Alana started to say in unison, as Hannibal chimed in, “I do not technically work for you, Jack--”

“I’ll write you up anyway! Now get the hell out!”

“This is all your fault,” Will smirked as he and Hannibal walked outside to take in some fresh air after such a tensely eventful afternoon.

“Perhaps you should not wear *that* shirt, Will, if you wish to claim that anything could possibly be ‘my fault.’”

Beverly Katz came walking towards the entrance of the building wearing a contentedly distracted smile. “Oh, good morning, you two,” she grinned, sliding her sunglasses to the top of her head. “How’s everything going?”

“That’s up for debate,” Will replied smoothly. “And by the way, it’s 1pm. So I’m guessing you’re having a good day, too.”

“*Brian Zeller*,” she whispered, coming closer to nudge Will with her elbow. Hannibal put his hands in his jacket pockets and pointed his gaze aloft at the drifting clouds in the azure sky. “Who knew that Brian Zeller would turn out to be a world class kisser? And furthermore...well, I’ll tell you later,” she winked.

Poor Jack was going to be livid when he realized that there was yet another new couple in his previously by-the-book, rule-following workplace.

“I think Zeller would be pretty excited to hear you say that,” Will said, pleased for both Beverly and Brian For both of...his friends?

Will had actual *friends*. He had a loving, wonderful relationship with a committed boyfriend. He had just been bitched out to within an inch of his life by Alana and Jack, and he couldn’t care less.

A familiar, whispering doubt crept back across his thoughts, claws scuttling around his head, scraping with gentle insistence. *How long can this possibly last?*

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this mostly-light chapter of sexiness and humor. I have to agree with Hannibal in blaming the green henley of sin ;) We're approaching the "Will finds out" part as you can probably tell, even as Hannibal and Will keep getting closer and happier

(sob of imminent angst). I've written ahead quite a bit and hope to have the next chapter up soon. :)

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Chapter specific tags: rough sex, cum play

Will stared down at the blood coating his shaking hands, trying in vain to figure out how it was possible. He had been at home, gutting a freshly caught fish to cook for dinner, when all of a sudden the fish began seeping blood in a slow spread across his counter. He looked down at the knife and it was gone, along with his kitchen and the sound of his dogs barking.

All that remained was the body of Beth LeBeau beneath him, and the woman's grisly remains streaking his palms.

He stumbled out of the room to find the rest of the FBI team staring at him aghast. It felt like he had nowhere to go, no way to escape this horrible blunder; to recede back inside himself was the most dangerous option of all. What could he do but mumble weak excuses and apologies, then get himself cleaned up and try to go on?

After a thorough reprimand from Jack and a few wry retorts that felt like ankle-turning twists in the same fragile, desperate dance characterizing a doomed collaboration, Will found himself in his car, speeding straight for the one place he knew he would be safe.

Anger roiled through him; indignation at the team for treating him like a freak again -- how could he have ever thought he fit in? What a joke, but it wasn't fucking funny. He was furious with himself for slipping into yet another wild escapade of madness, but his life had him trapped. Bedelia and Hannibal had both warned him that he was pushing himself to a breakdown, but he thought that he had been getting better lately, that it would be okay to keep doing the work. Obviously he couldn't trust himself, not even that far. It was starting to look like his only options were to leave the field or find himself institutionalized...but it could be worse. How many more times could he stagger out of a thick reverie before one day he *was* the killer, the answer at the end of his own hunt for justice?

"Will?" Hannibal asked in concern when Will barged into his office. "What's happened?"

He went to Will and looked him over carefully, feeling his forehead and examining his bloodshot eyes.

"I'm-- sorry, you could have been with a patient, I wasn't thinking."

"It's quite alright, mylimasis, you may always come to me. I am always waiting for you to come to me. Why don't you tell me what has you so shaken?" He led Will to a small couch between two paintings on the dark red wall, and Will sank into it gratefully.

“I contaminated a crime scene. I had an episode and I woke up with my hands dredged in the victim’s remains.” He held his hands out and shook his head, devastated. “I look at my hands now, and I can still see the blood, still feel smell the coppery taint of it on my skin, I can fucking *taste* it, Hannibal.”

Hannibal listened calmly, save for the subtle sweep of his tongue over his own lips and a slight tightening of his hands on his knees. “You need to take a longer break from these cases, Will. You’re inviting the madness in, rather than bolting the door to preserve your peace.”

“How can I live in peace, knowing I could be saving lives but I’m not, because I’m too busy prioritizing my own well-being?” Will blinked back tears, his throat tight. That line was true and he'd used it to justify staying in the field for a while now. But there was another fear beneath it, a much darker, more insidious paranoia. “What if I retire from field work, but the hallucinations and the sleepwalking never go away, what if they just keep getting worse?”

“I think perhaps you are afraid to find out.”

“What’s going to happen to me?”

Hannibal sat back, hands clasped in his lap, fingers thumping over each other. “What you need is a grip on your own control. I think the sense of losing yourself is what troubles you above all else. What can you do, here and now, to take command of your mind and circumstances, despite all the chaos around and within you?”

Will gazed into Hannibal’s eyes, so like glistening amber glass, as likely to shine as to shatter and cut. Dangerous eyes, but under constant, careful control. He watched the swallow in the doctor’s throat.

“I could take what I want,” he suggested, climbing onto Hannibal’s lap, straddling him and seizing his jacket lapels. “I could tell you exactly what to do, and you could obey me.”

“Anything,” Hannibal smiled gently, his big hands landing on Will’s ass with an affectionate grope. He looked up at Will with perfect reverence.

“Fuck me, here and now, when anyone could walk in. Don’t be quiet about it, don’t bite back a single moan. Show me how much you need it, too.” Will yanked off Hannibal’s jacket and ripped open his shirt, causing Hannibal to growl, flipping Will onto his back on the couch, pulling his trousers down with the same impatience.

“I don’t have any supplies here,” Hannibal murmured, breath hot against Will’s neck as he bit into fading bruises, bringing them back to shining, aching prominence. “But there are other ways to--”

“No,” Will hissed, grabbing Hannibal’s face in both hands, “I told you to fuck me, and that’s what you’re going to do. You’re going to take me as roughly as you possibly can, make me cry if possible, find *your* edge and push yourself over it. Come inside me and make me sloppy with it, here in your perfectly pristine office. We’ve both been tested, and we’re both clean. Right?”

“You know it as well as I do,” Hannibal nodded, dazed, trembling at Will’s words.

“Then do as you’re fucking told, Hannibal,” Will said, his eyes flashing turbulent liquid blue, “I need you.”

“Turn over,” Hannibal answered gruffly, guiding Will with a harsh pull on his hips.

Hannibal’s thumbs pressed hard into the soft skin beneath Will’s hips as he lavished his tongue over Will’s hole with greedy, sopping wet indulgence. Will moaned and felt the reverberation of Hannibal doing the same, just before he drew his mouth back and sank his finger inside Will, opening him hastily enough that even with plentiful saliva to lubricate the penetration, it was too sudden and it hurt; it hurt magnificently. The punishment of it had Will dizzy, the sadness and fear inside him ebbing back in an instant response to the rough treatment. Hannibal spanked him mercilessly with the flat of his hand and Will could have disintegrated into pure bliss.

“Against the bookshelf,” he said hoarsely, “Now. I’m ready.”

Hannibal stripped off his pants, his shirt still hanging open, buttons dangling from loose strings. He left Will’s jeans in a rumpled heap on the floor, then picked Will up as if he weighed nothing, carried along by lustful adrenaline as he pressed his back against the library with its austere collection of ponderous, jewel-toned hard-covered tomes. Before Will could get his breath back, Hannibal had positioned his legs around his back and began sliding his thick erection inside Will’s achingly over-sensitized hole.

“Yes,” he sighed, keeping his legs up as high around Hannibal as possible, encouraging him deeper.

Although Hannibal had been generous with the natural lubrication, and although he pressed in slowly, there was nothing to prevent the roughness of being breached like this, especially when Will intentionally pivoted his body, wanting to make it impossible for Hannibal to resist thrusting in further.

Will’s vision was blurred with red and black blotches, though he couldn’t be sure they weren’t filmy splashes of blood across his eyes, and the mingled agony and ecstasy of the moment was more than he could bear. It was exactly what he needed, to be forced outside himself, into the far-away where there was nothing but Hannibal taking him over, making him endure extremes until he was centered again, until he could breathe and believe he was a whole person.

“My Will,” Hannibal said throatily, his hips snapping ferociously up into Will, his cries of pleasure enough to rival the volume of Will’s own.

“Over--” Hannibal was fucking him so hard that Will could barely get words out -- “your -- desk.”

Hannibal moved with speed and aggression, easing himself from Will just to grab him by the hair and toss him harshly towards the desk. “Bend over.”

He kept a hand planted to Will's low back as he shoved himself back in, and their cries were so loud they seemed to echo off the walls.

Will's fingers scrambled around for a hold on anything, his whole upper body jolting forward with every sharp thrust, the edge of the desk slamming into his belly. Hannibal got a handful of his curls and yanked firmly, and the pain sang through his body.

There came a sudden knock at the office door behind them, and Will could barely hear it above the oceans crashing black and wild against his skull, the sparks catching fire with every movement of Hannibal inside him, the beautifully broken melody of their moans, Will muttering jagged fragments of swears, Hannibal apparently doing the same in at least three languages.

But there was certainly a knock, following by a hesitant female voice asking, "Dr. Lecter? I'm a little early, are you there?"

Will choked back a wicked laugh as Hannibal called hoarsely, "Please have a seat--" He spanked Will quite audibly, pulling his cock almost all the way out. He was being wanton, doing all he could to risk them getting caught, just as Will had instructed. "-- Mrs. Griffiths, I'll be with you shortly."

Will smirked over his shoulder, and Hannibal took the incentive to slam his cock in all the way, harder than ever. He went on and on as Will felt his orgasm speeding closer like a freight train, the pressure building and threatening, and then he was spilling in torrents of sticky white seed all over Hannibal's floor.

"Mylimasis," Hannibal sighed wetly against his skin, trailing hot, messy kisses all over his back, and that's what did it.

Hannibal didn't make Will cry by hurting him, as he had been requested to do; instead, he cracked Will's heart open by showing such ceaseless affection even now, during such a completely rebellious, insane act of lust.

"So perfect for me, my darling," he murmured, squeezing and caressing Will's ass. He kept his thrusts slow and hard, until finally he came with a ragged heave of his hips against Will, his cum spurting powerfully and coating Will inside. Some of it dripped out when Hannibal withdrew, so he caught it up between his fingers and offered it to Will.

Will slurped it up eagerly, then fellated Hannibal's fingers so that Hannibal growled, swirling the excess cum from Will's ass around the head of his cock and fucking him again until his body gave out and he had no choice but to stop, his head falling weakly against Will's shoulder.

They heard the outer door slam shut as Hannibal's patient departed, most likely mortified and-or infuriated by what she'd overheard.

"I think I lost you a patient," Will observed with a wince. "Sorry." His legs were wobbly as he turned to face Hannibal. They both knew he wasn't sorry; he was feeling far too selfish for

that. Hannibal considered it his privilege, a gift, to help Will learn how to be selfish. Neither of them felt it necessary to verbalize this understanding.

“Don’t be; it was more than worth it to give you what you needed. Was it what you needed?”

“Exactly,” Will sighed, slipping his hands up under what was left of Hannibal's shirt, feeling the hot, smooth skin of his back. “I hope it was what you needed, too.”

“So much,” Hannibal smiled, “So much, Will. Every time. Although I suggest we do not make a habit of the office sex, lest I lose whatever remains of my professional integrity and ability to draw new patients.”

Will blushed, then spoke impulsively, “Listen, I want us to live together. I don’t want you to think it’s because I’m clinging to you for stability. Hell, maybe I am, but that’s not *why*. Come here.”

He drew Hannibal’s face down slightly and leaned up to murmur into his ear as his heart raced erratically. “I love--.”

“Tell me tonight,” Hannibal interrupted, hugging him, rocking him in his arms. “Tell me again and again. I’ll come to you.”

Will nodded, eyes bright with tears.

Chapter 12

Hannibal came to Will's house that evening with an earthenware pot so that he could make lamb tagine. They worked together in the small kitchen, Will shadowing Hannibal and helping to sprinkle the cinnamon, cardamon, cumin and tumeric over the vibrant pink meat, then breaking up fresh mint leaves that would serve as a garnish for the finished meal.

“I bet you know a lot about this recipe,” Will smiled into Hannibal’s shoulder as he stood behind him, caressing the bold outlines of veins on the backs of his hands. “Where it comes from, when it originated, what it symbolizes…”

“As a matter of fact, I do know quite a bit about it,” Hannibal replied with a slight pink tinge in his cheeks.

He glanced down at the neat wedges of potatoes and onions he’d just fanned out on the baking sheet resting on the counter, then gave a precise nod. Everything was properly arranged, except of course for his heart.

It throbbed wretchedly as Will led him to the bed with a trusting smile such as he never bestowed on anyone else. There was no fear, no hesitation, only a contentment that felt almost like peace. Will lay down on his back and pulled Hannibal close, wrapping his arms around him as Hannibal rested his cheek on Will’s chest. The dinner was cooked, left to keep warm in the oven so that the juices could permeate for the best flavor.

“Tell me,” Will entreated softly, rubbing his fingers through Hannibal’s hair, “Tell me all about it, babe.”

Hannibal glanced up to see Will’s eyes fluttering shut. He’d never bothered asking why Will bestowed this pet name on him out of all the possible options; it was perfectly obvious that nobody in their right mind would call Hannibal “baby” or “babe.” He was simply too serious, respectable, and sophisticated for such a term. “Sweetheart,” “darling,” or “my love” seemed logical. But Will saw the delicate underbelly of Hannibal’s emotions and stroked it so carefully, held it close and safe. Will wanted to call him something that matched the sentiment of the emotional nakedness that made Hannibal tremble, almost fully exposed.

“The first known account of lamb tajine appears in the *Arabian Nights*,” Hannibal explained. “the recipe takes its name from the earthenware crockery in which it is created. The Bedouins, a nomadic people from the Arabian Peninsula, introduced dried fruit into the ingredients, forming a perfect balance of the savory, spicy and sweet. Of course, while most popular in Morocco, today it’s quite common in London restaurants, although they often serve it with chips, which is very nearly offensive.”

Will pulled him up into a warm, lingering kiss, catching Hannibal’s body between his thighs and hitching his legs up to hug him tightly. Hannibal had the impression he was captured, he was Will’s prey, and the other man would never let him go. He was being smothered in emotion and want, and it was indescribably beautiful.

“That was impressive, even for you,” Will smirked between kisses, though his smile fell slightly when he drew back to watch the conflicted passion playing out over Hannibal’s features.

“What is it about you? I can’t stop,” Will sighed, rolling them over so he lay atop Hannibal, soon grinding as their kisses resumed.

“I love you,” Will murmured, and Hannibal was tumbling, traversing perilous fathoms. He needed to be smothered again, held back from himself and everything he’d set in motion to ruin this, every wicked play he would still enact to divide them.

With anyone else he would be ashamed, staring up in devotion, unable to summon words to make this redeemable, to explain why he cared for any fragment of redemption in this life, why only Will could make him care so much. But there was no way Hannibal could change who he was. He didn’t want to change, but he regretted the damage. He was the living essence of Will’s doom.

“Love you,” Will repeated, clasping both of Hannibal’s trembling hands and kissing ardently over the knuckles, down each finger. He nuzzled up under Hannibal’s sweater, kissing and licking his way up Hannibal’s belly and chest, gently biting down on each nipple, swirling his tongue, sucking. Hannibal moaned, and Will giggled when his head got stuck in the soft grip of the sweater. He pulled it off, then his own t-shirt, and grinned down at his prey. “You’re really all mine.”

“You finally believe it,” Hannibal sighed, nearly breaking in two when Will pulled down his trousers and began stroking and licking at his cock.

“Can’t stop,” Will muttered, rendering Hannibal rock hard with ease, sucking and sighing at the taste and feel of his lover, taking as much of his erection as he could into the hot, wet embrace of his mouth. “So hard for you, Hannibal.”

Will roved his hands up Hannibal’s shapely thighs, kneading and stroking the firm muscle. The curves of his body were so strong, supple and...tempting, tempting in a new way. He followed the instinct slinking down his spine in erotic suspense and pulled his mouth off of Hannibal’s cock. Hannibal sighed, running his fingers through Will’s hair, allowing Will to hold his thighs up and nibble teasingly over both ass cheeks, eventually making his way to his hole and adding a single, curious lick.

Hannibal groaned and tightened his grip on Will’s curls. Will grew even harder, which he hadn’t imagined could even happen, until he was aching, straining, his body crying out to take Hannibal, and he set his tongue soft and flat against Hannibal’s hole, allowing his saliva to flow freely, everything getting wet, hot and relaxed, until he could press the tip of his tongue inside and Hannibal gripped his hair so hard Will thought he would pull it out by the root.

Will sat up with a mischievous smile, his curls riotous and pale cheeks rosy with exertion and anticipation. He licked his lips, enjoying the sight of Hannibal lying with his arms and legs haphazardly spread, perspiration dotting his brow, moistening his chest hair and stomach

where his breath caught in delighted agitation. A tremor ran through Will as he undid his trousers and carefully released his aching cock.

He found the lube and readied himself before preparing Hannibal a bit more, slowly kissing his lips, licking the luscious shape of them and biting down, sucking as he slid slick fingers into the warm, velvety clutch of Hannibal's body.

"All mine," he sighed again, and when he added a third finger, stroking slowly but firmly in and out, Hannibal grabbed his free arm in a vice grip. Will looked into his face and found him entreating with a single nod.

He lay atop Hannibal and circled his cock around his hole teasingly, which he could only manage a few times before all the moaning and clinging and panting between them was too much to handle. He pushed in and clasped Hannibal's face, kissing him fervently and rocking his hips up and back, delving his throbbing erection ever deeper.

"You wouldn't do this with anyone else, would you?" Will sighed into Hannibal's ear, kissing along the side of his face. He didn't know why he knew this; he just did.

"No, mylimasis," Hannibal gritted out, lifting his legs higher, massaging his hands shakily over Will's back, holding him now with worshipful attentiveness, living and dying for every sweet glide of Will inside him, striking his prostate now on nearly every stroke.

"I'll take care of you," Will promised, realizing his wish of having Hannibal's hidden vulnerability in his hands to treasure and keep for himself. "I've got you, okay?"

Hannibal nodded again, tears of pleasure and pained surrender clinging to pale, long lashes, and Will switched positions, arranging Hannibal on hands and knees before him. They cried out in unison as Will sank back in, knowing that every inch must burn, that they were both well-endowed and Will was girthy inside Hannibal's tightly willing embrace. He added more lube and grabbed Hannibal's hips, slamming in now, riding a tidal wave of euphoria off of Hannibal's desperate, multi-lingual whimpers of joy, sensing that for every rough spark of intrusion, there was an accompanying jolt of bliss, and they both loved it like this, hard and fast, hips smacking together, skin slapping loudly, the wave cresting and enveloping them both, pulling them down, down, down to the bottom of the sea and further, into blackness and an explosion of pleasure too powerful to be endured unless they loved each other here and now, the way they both needed.

As the sensations within him tightened and coiled to bursting, Will reached under him to take hold of Hannibal's cock and stroke in chaotic time with his last few sloppy, rhythmless thrusts. Together, they fell under the wave and died, smothered in passion, devoured whole and left ocean-pummeled on the shore. Will spooned up behind Hannibal, kissing his shoulders, their breaths coming in short spurts, cocks still dripping and Hannibal's hole wet with Will's cum seeping out.

"Well, I've never been on top before," Will chuckled as Hannibal turned around and stared at him, stunned. "I mean I've never done that, with a guy."

“You certainly…” he shivered, and Will rubbed his arms in comfort. “You certainly could have fooled me. You show such remarkable acumen for whatever you undertake with heartfelt ambition.”

“Oh?” Will smirked, “Is that your way of saying I’m a great lay?”

“It’s my way of saying that you surprise me at every turn, my darling boy, most of all by showing me the things I want that I never anticipated wanting. Even the closeness between us, even to hear you say you care, it’s nearly more than I can seem to understand.”

“It’s hard to contain it all,” Will nodded, “In a human body. I feel my emotions running limitless beyond the boundaries of skin and bone, past where my heart and soul should end and yours should begin. Sometimes when we’re making love, I can’t tell the difference between us anymore.”

“I would have imagined that to be a problem for you in the past...your tremendous empathy making it hard to distinguish between a lover’s desire and your own needs.”

“Yeah, it was. It was like that with other people I slept with, but it’s not the same with you...it isn’t that I take your desires on as my own, but more like...we *are* each other’s desires, naturally, without having to process a single thought about it, we blur. Our pleasure is one.”

“We fit together,” Hannibal smiled, gentle humor spiking the sad devotion in his eyes. “Splendidly, Will.”

They ate the lamb tagine and homemade flatbread in bed, wearing only underwear, Will’s leg slung over Hannibal’s. Will sat on a pillow because his ass was still *killing* him from that afternoon.

“No,” he laughed as the dogs drew near and tried to steal the fragrant, spicy dinner, “I gave you guys your food when it was time for you to eat. It’s not my fault you always gobble it down in three bites. Go sit down.”

One by one, like adorably obedient children, the dogs turned with faint whines and went to their beds, resigned to a quiet evening of relaxation slowly sinking into sleep by the warmth of the space heater.

“Do you ever use your fireplace?” Hannibal inquired, and Will licked his thumb free of sauce, chortling.

“I never have time. I’m not even here that often, especially these days. I know you’re not *cold*,” he smiled, since they were both still radiating heat from the sex, the hot shower that followed, and the oven which had been on for much longer than usual, keeping dinner warm.

“Not at all, my darling. I only maintain a consistent curiosity as to your habits, which also extends to wondering why your bed is in the living room.”

“You know why,” Will said wryly, taking a sip of Chardonnay. “Go on, psychoanalyze me, baby, We both know you can’t resist.”

“Don’t be cross,” Hannibal begged with a cute pout. “I worry that you are this paranoid about possible home invasion. Is it because of the dreams, or simply because of the violent horrors you have witnessed in your field work?”

“Yes, definitely.” Will’s smile was grim, but he didn’t lock Hannibal out of his mind. What was the point, when the man was so thoroughly under Will’s skin? “You think I’d feel safer if I moved into your house?”

“I hope so,” Hannibal admitted, putting his plate aside and taking Will’s hand in his. “And I would feel better, giving you that sense of protection.”

“I’m the FBI agent, shouldn’t I be protecting you?” Will arched a brow.

“We’ve both shown our ability to take a life, as a means of defense. Perhaps you possess the greater technical prowess as a combatant, but you also risk suppressing your skill by lying to yourself about how much you like it.”

“Like what?” Will asked, getting a little surly. “Are you saying, again, that I enjoy killing people?”

“You admitted to me, point blank, that you liked killing Garret Jacob Hobbs.” Hannibal sat there calmly drinking his wine, and he was pretty, and it was pretty infuriating.

“Well, yeah but that was because in killing him, I saved Abigail.”

“My sweetness and light, you did not need to shoot him ten times.” Hannibal’s smile contained so much affection that Will was momentarily silenced, frozen between reciprocal fondness and a blaze of offended anger.

“I...I may like enacting justice, when I come across someone so vicious, so cruel,” Will confessed, measuring his words carefully. Now he had to balance the statement: “But that doesn’t give me the right to go around murdering criminals based on my own instinctual verdicts.”

“I think it might be a better world if you did have that right,” Hannibal suggested. He stopped just short of stating that Will should take the right for himself.

“As fun as that would be, it’s also wrong in about a million ways, but thank you for the support, honey.” Will rolled his eyes, caressing Hannibal’s knee.

“What does your instinct tell you about our plan for cohabitation? Where do you feel we belong?”

“I think...we need our own place. Somewhere new. A house we could find and make our own, as a couple, reflecting what we both like.” Will grinned at the way Hannibal’s face lit up, at the sight of him so gorgeous and golden, all but naked in Will’s disheveled sheets, his damp hair slicked back to make his caramel eyes and sharp cheekbones even more striking.

“The world’s most luxuriously rustic living space,” Hannibal posited. “Why do I have the distinct feeling it’s going to be fun house-hunting with you?”

“You’ll want to look at places that are way too fussy and expensive for my taste, and I’ll want to look at places too remote and woodsy for you to deal with. We’ll *bicker*,” Will suggested, raising his eyebrows.

“I think I’ll like bickering with you,” Hannibal said, leaning in for a kiss that was sweet with wine and the leftover chocolate-covered cherries from Will’s gift basket. “Hmm.” He nuzzled his nose against Will’s with an infectious grin, unable to help his indescribable bliss.

“I think I’ll love it,” Will agreed.

In that moment, wrestling each other back down into the sheets even though they were both bone-tired and sexually spent, Hannibal knew perfectly well this was one of the happiest nights of his life. Although he could not have known specifically that it was the last night he would share with Will for a very long time, Hannibal knew it was likely enough. So he made the most of every moment, every lazy, greedy kiss, every way they held each other and found new ways to drive each other wild.

Within twenty-four hours, everything would be changed forever.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> Okay, here we have it, the onset of the angst. I think this chapter is about as bad as it gets, as we are still on our way to a happy ending for our boys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"What am I now, what am I now?
What if I'm someone I don't want around?
I'm falling again, I'm falling again, I'm falling"
—Harry Styles, "Falling"

The knock at the door was abrupt and too loud, sounding as if it came in a panic. Hannibal stood from his armchair and forced himself to stay calm, placing his book down rather than flinging it. He was too on edge lately; he had to maintain control, even if that *was* Will at the door, even if something was terribly wrong or Will had discerned the truth and was here to confront him, he must…

His ongoing abstraction was curtailed as he opened the door to find Dr. Abel Gideon standing there, Will Graham right behind him with a gun to his head.

"Hello Dr. Lecter," Gideon remarked, snidely blithe. "Pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"Get inside," Will insisted, shoving Gideon forward. They proceeded to the dining room, where Gideon took a seat at the table with an air of resignation.

Hannibal stepped close to Will as fear struck his heart. He looked absolutely wretched, torn asunder by the illness, drenched in sweat, eyes darting in a near-sleepwalking state. There seemed to be no way to predict it lately, even with all his knowledge and intrusion, the way Will was absolutely fine one moment and near feral the next.

"Will, you're unwell," he stated, keeping his voice smooth.

Will might suffer a seizure at any moment, even a fatal one, and Hannibal cared far too much. He might lose himself in the bargain he'd forged with himself to protect his pride and secrets; what would there be left of him if Will was gone? Surely nothing worth having, no one he wanted to know.

But he must keep to the path he'd set out on, mustn't allow such weak thoughts to ruin everything when he was so close to bringing his plan to the next phase. Now was the time to stay strong in his resolve, not let it shatter simply because Will was manifesting common, thoroughly expected symptoms of a convenient ailment.

If he believed that God cared a fig for the concerns of man (outside of watching them tear themselves to pieces for His own entertainment), Hannibal might have thought He gave Will the encephalitis to prevent Hannibal from making a vital mistake and telling his secret far too soon. Why would Will happen to come down with a malady almost ideally designed to help Hannibal frame him, if it was not the hand of the almighty, or at least a helpful twist of fate? Sometimes, Hannibal allowed himself to roll such theories around his mind, mainly for his own intellectual enjoyment and even amusement. Perhaps as an added incentive to resist the love Will offered until they were on equal footing. Now it felt like reckless folly.

“Tell me who I brought,” Will demanded, shaking like a leaf, “Who’s sitting over there?”

“Who do you see?” Hannibal asked softly, checking his pulse, feeling his forehead, running the usual battery of tests as if this was nothing out of the ordinary.

“I see Hobbs,” Will admitted, clenching his jaw. He cocked the gun and pointed it at Gideon, who looked nervously to Hannibal for help, although he was smart enough to know he must keep his mouth shut.

“There’s no one there,” Hannibal replied. He eased the gun from Will’s sweaty grip and set it on the mantel as Will rounded on him, incensed, but more than that, heartbroken. He knew Hannibal was lying. He could tell the difference.

“No, no, that’s not true, I know someone is there, I know someone is *there*!” He shuddered convulsively.

“Will, you must calm yourself. I assure you, you arrived alone.”

“No, please don’t lie to me,” Will begged, tears streaming down his face. “You’re my boyfriend, Hannibal, you’re supposed to love me! Why would you lie to me?”

“Will,” Hannibal sighed as his heart crumpled. His sacred resolve died and he took Will’s face in his hands, entreating again more loudly, “Will! Stay with me. It’s Abel Gideon. Do you hear me? It’s Dr. Gideon, sitting at my table over there.”

Will gave a ragdoll nod, but he was still right on the verge of a seizure. “I r-remember him being in my car. He was in my car, Dr. Gideon, but then he was Hobbs, and I didn’t know what to do, so I came here.”

“Of course, my love.” Hannibal let himself say the words in English for the first time and pulled Will into a hug, ignoring the way Gideon stared at them entirely baffled.

“I think your boyfriend there is feeling a bit unstable,” Gideon contributed drily.

“You’ve shown wisdom thus far in keeping your thoughts to yourself, Dr. Gideon. Please resume that approach.” Hannibal shot him his deadliest look and Gideon clammed up again, averting his gaze to the cobalt blue wall.

“You’re suffering from encephalitis, Will. Come and sit over here, I’ll get you a glass of water, and then we must get you to the hospital.”

“What?” Will mumbled, collapsing on the couch, holding onto consciousness by the thinnest thread.

“Your brain is on fire. We must get you the help you need to put the fire out. Dr. Gideon, come with me if you would.”

Just a brief trip to retrieve the handcuffs from Will’s car, then Hannibal secured Gideon to the refrigerator door.

“I’m trusting you not to break your wrist again, Dr. Gideon, or you’ll soon find many other things broken as well.” Hannibal kept his words vague enough that they couldn’t be used against him later, but direct enough for a fellow murderer to understand quite easily. Again, Gideon gave a tense nod.

Hannibal carried a glass of water to Will. Gently tipping the liquid to Will’s lips, he satisfied himself by watching him swallow down a few sips. Then he picked up the phone and did the unthinkable, twice.

“Jack, I’m at my house with Will Graham. Abel Gideon abducted him at gunpoint and forced him to come here. Will has also had another episode, and I believe I’ve accurately diagnosed the cause. Please send an ambulance for him as well as an escort back to the BSHCI for Dr. Gideon.”

“But I don’t understand why Gideon wanted Will to come here,” Jack remarked as the police lights shone blue and red glimmers all over the fresh snow.

They watched from Hannibal’s front steps as Gideon was placed in a cop car to go back to whence he’d escaped.

“It’s simple enough, Jack; he must have asked to go to Will’s home. In his confusion, lost in a trance due to his illness, Will gave him my address. He spends enough time here lately that it must have felt like home.”

The paramedics got Will onto a stretcher, and Hannibal joined him for the ride to the hospital. He told himself he could still maintain things as normal with Will somehow, then find a way to entice Will to give into his inner darkness so that he could tell the whole truth. The idea of sending Will to prison had died along with his ability to watch Will do so.

Will didn’t wake again until the next morning, which found him lying in a hospital bed hooked up to an IV. Instinctual disorientation made him jolt, blinking in panic, but Hannibal roused from his sleeping position in the chair by the bed, laying his hand over Will’s.

“You’re alright, Will, you’re safe. I’m here.” His voice was hoarse with exhaustion; he’d had two hours’ sleep at most.

Will’s fingers curled around Hannibal's and he blinked slowly, nodding. “What happened?”

After recounting the tale, Hannibal continued, “You might have had this ailment for several weeks now, ever since you started sleepwalking. I’ll call the nurse, see about getting you some breakfast. You must be famished, and while I hate to see you eating hospital food, it is preferable to my leaving you at present when you’re still coming to terms with your illness.”

“I’ve had encephalitis all that time?” Will’s brow furrowed and Hannibal’s free hand froze over the assistance button on the bed. “How is it that you never suspected?”

“I knew it was one possibility among several. There was no way to know for sure without a brain scan. They’ll be treating you now with fluids and minerals to keep you hydrated, anti-inflammatory drugs to bring down the pressure in your skull.” He frowned, heart sinking as Will’s fingers slowly drew back from his own. “An antiviral medication to stop the ailment in its tracks.”

A cold snap flashed in Will’s eyes, startlingly bright blue under the blinking fluorescent light. How regrettable, that the confrontation must occur in this horrid little room, Will trapped in an uncomfortable bed with that hospital smell of antiseptics barely masking death, permeating the air between them.

“Why didn’t you advise me to get a brain scan? You knew it was possible I had encephalitis but you said and did nothing for weeks, observing my symptoms that closely? You let me suffer like that when there was a potential solution right there? And why,” he sat up straighter as Hannibal sank back into his chair, “Why last night? Why suddenly tell me what was going on?”

“Last night, you pleaded with me not to lie to you. Just that easily, I decided to stop.”

“So you’ve been lying to me about why I was sick, that’s...I don’t know, that’s cruel and destructive. Why? Did you just love taking care of me that much, did you want me to be codependent that badly? I didn’t need to be sick to want to be with you. I can’t understand why you’d…”

Hannibal stood and stiffly walked to the window, needlessly adjusting the blinds.

Will said, “You needed me disoriented, or I’d realize something you didn’t want me to know.”

A whirlwind of images took over Will’s mind, flashbacks of the rough, animalistic sex and the biting, the choking, the occasional glimpses of anger or jealousy in Hannibal’s otherwise sweet cinnamon gaze that sometimes both scared and aroused him. Hannibal, in the back of the ambulance sewing a man’s kidneys back in. Hovering over Marissa Schurr’s corpse with a strange shimmer of pride about him. His chipper enthusiasm for helping out at the FBI, and with Abigail’s rehabilitation...his obsession with cooking...the *trophies*...details and realities slid into place with enough symmetry that Will knew his suspicions had been building all along, held off far more by his own denial and repression than by the encephalitis’ fever grip.

Through all the gruesome revelations there ran an illicit thrill, which was Will’s understanding that in the horror there was beauty, and in the Chesapeake Ripper, much to admire. His ravenstag, his wendigo, his beast. His unspeakable desire. They were one and the

same, embodied in the only person he'd trusted to save him from all of the above. If he gave into that understanding, he would lose himself, become a killer just like Hannibal, so he had to fight it with whatever strength he had left. It wasn't much, but it was his only layer of protection left between sanity and the tempting, beckoning abyss of madness. To love Hannibal was madness.

But what burned most of all was the betrayal, the fact that all along he believed Hannibal truly cared for him, wanted the best for him.

"*You.* All along, it was you."

Will watched as Hannibal turned slowly around, his eyes desperately miserable although he otherwise kept his expression blank.

"Ripper," Will accused.

"Yes," said Hannibal bluntly.

"You're the copycat, too, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And." Will took a deep, shaky breath. "You've been feeding me...all of us...your trophies. Your victims' *organs*, limbs...their flesh and blood..." Nausea swarmed violently in his stomach but he fought it off. He could scream and cry and vomit later; this was a time for truth. He had to know everything. Hannibal nodded politely, folding his hands behind his back.

"Abigail," Will guessed, "you probably saw her as some sort of protege for you, given that she seems to possess some of her father's psychopathic tendencies. Did you kill Nick Boyle together?"

"No, Abigail killed him in self-defense, although like you, she has a liberal definition of self-defense. I helped her hide the body."

Will's laugh was perhaps the worst sound of all, a laugh of pure rage, after all the times Hannibal had caused him to give into full-bodied giggles of irresistible joy. "You know, right from the beginning, I knew it was too good to be true. I knew you couldn't want me for *me*, and I was right. I was just another piece on your chess board that had to be put into the right place."

Hannibal shook his head, but Will went on boldly, "You probably planned to pin it all on me if I ever pointed a finger at you to Jack Crawford. Best plan, really, given that I was the only one who could catch you. Two birds, one stone and all that. Get rid of me, take the heat off yourself. It's smart. It's what I'd do."

"Will, please--"

"So you start dating me, just to set it all up even better, keep a close eye on me, control my life. You find out I *like* giving you a measure of control, and isn't that just perfect? Let me dig

myself a hole, going to work sick because you never told me why I was sick or how to get better, let me make a fool of myself contaminating crime scenes and acting unstable, acting like a killer. Was it hard being close with me physically, was that just something you had to endure? Do you even like sex, do you *feel* things?"

They both knew Will was being cruel on purpose, and they both knew Hannibal deserved it. No point in Hannibal calling him out for dishonesty, of all crimes, after all the times he'd looked Will right in the face and lied.

"Stop that," Hannibal entreated, his eyes strained from holding back tears. "I love you, and you know it."

Will shook his head again. "You would have let them put me in Chilton's institution."

"I saw it as a necessary and temporary evil."

"What's my worst fear, Hannibal? Tell me. I know you know."

"You fear being crazy. You fear losing your sense of self, your identity, to madness."

"You would have let me think I was crazy, just to cover your own ass, and it's sick. You make me sicker than any stupid fever ever could." He kept his voice deadly quiet. No one would overhear this exchange, but that wouldn't stop it from tearing Hannibal's world to shreds.

"Will, whatever I did, I honestly believed that in the long span of events it would be for your benefit, and I wanted there to be a way for us to be together. I love--"

Will was so petrified with horror that he felt like he had to unhinge his jaw to speak. "No, you don't."

"You can't tell me I don't love you and suddenly make it true. It isn't that simple; there is nothing simple about us."

Will couldn't stand to look at that handsome, normally serene face brought to such devastating woe. He might start to believe in Hannibal's grief, even his affection, and he couldn't do that at any cost. Staring down at his hands, he wanted nothing more than to use them to reach out and draw Hannibal into his arms. But how could he, knowing that if left to his own devices, Hannibal would have destroyed Will's life, knowing how thoroughly he had been used?

"No, let me tell you what's *simple* and clear-cut, Hannibal, you were going to *leave* me in there in a cell, all alone in the dark. You were going to abandon me, like my mother abandoned me and like my dad left me, day after day after night all *alone*--"

Hannibal thought of the little boy version of Will who stayed home from school with no one to care for him when he was ill, the little boy searching fairy tales for hope, growing a heart made out of darkly romantic, impossible dreams. He wanted to protect that heart, cherish him forever, but first he would have to prove to Will that his love was real. At the moment, it seemed the most impossible dream of all.

“I thought facing your fear would ultimately strengthen your ability to understand yourself, and to finally become free from the painful shackles you wear. You have flaws in your intuitive beliefs about what makes you who you are. Those chains you place on your instincts are dragging you down. Had you been isolated, you would have been able to withstand the agony, would have emerged stronger than ever and knowing yourself. You are already stronger than you realize, Will. I thought it would be worth it, although I have been dreading it since I first concocted the plan.”

“*Stop* with these vile, manipulative games you play with my head. You think my brain is just a toy for you to fiddle with and rearrange to fit your own design, and you call that *love*! I fucking hate you so much right now, trust me you can’t imagine -- just get the fuck away from me. If you don’t, I’ll scream, and you’ll blow your almighty cover.”

Hannibal stepped back and turned white as a ghost, as if Will had slapped him across the face.

“If that’s what you want.” Hannibal brushed his knuckles across his cheek where the tears were flowing freely. He looked down at his hand. The tears surprised him even more than Will's words.

“How can you stand there *crying*, knowing that of course I don’t want you to leave. Of course, I still love you, maybe even more now than ever. Now I know what it feels like to have to let you go, and it feels like my heart is being ripped out of my chest. And I know there must be something very wrong with me because all I really want to do is go back to the beginning and have it all again, all of our time together, not knowing what you are.”

Resentment finally blossomed, red and dark, in Hannibal’s gaze, a new disease riddling his already mangled heart. “Then you don’t love me. You don’t even want to know me, much less yourself.”

Hannibal thought if he could make himself believe Will incapable of loving the monster, he could survive this loss. You cannot lose what you have never had, and if Will found him so repellant, then perhaps Hannibal had been mistaken in thinking he had finally found his soulmate, after spending a lifetime not even knowing he wanted one.

“Listen to me, before you go: you’re going to stop killing. Altogether. If I find out you’ve hurt anyone, I will take you down. You won't be able to stop me; I'll catch you when you least expect it.”

“Why not turn me in now?”

Will shrugged. “It won’t solve anything; it won’t bring anyone back. Maybe I care about you enough that I don’t want to put you in a black hole to suffer alone for God knows how long.”

“Despite hating me,” Hannibal nodded, and Will shot him a hollow look.

“Despite hating you. Now go.”

Hannibal turned and walked away. He did not kill again or see Will Graham in person for six months.

And then everything changed again.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry!! :'(I have the next two chapters almost ready and will post shortly; I don't want to leave you hanging like that. <3 The forthcoming angst will be more of the smoldering sexual tension between exes variety ;) ...among other things.

Chapter 14

Six Months Later

"Jack said attending tonight's gala is mandatory," Beverly reminded Will as they walked around the Academy grounds with cups of coffee in their hands, enjoying the warmth of the Spring sunshine.

Well, as much as Will enjoyed anything these days.

"But hey, the food is always good," she added.

"I don't care about the food," Will frowned, sullen at the dreadful thought of having to attend the FBI charity auction gala. The function had been organized in collaboration with the National Association of Criminal Psychology, which meant that all its key local members would also be there. In his mind, Will tallied up all the reasons why he hated the thought of this stupid fucking gala:

1. He had to wear a tux.
2. It would require him to be sociable, among strangers, snobs, and colleagues who enjoyed nothing more than looking down their noses at the strange young profiler with the uncanny ability to nab serial killers.
3. The invitation included a plus-one, and everyone else was going to bring a date.
4. He just wanted to hide out at home with his dogs, where it was safe and cozy.

He could only think of one advantage to the gala, and it was that Hannibal might be there. He shoved the thought away, roughly clamping down on the gushing inner wound that reopened whenever he admitted to himself how much he missed Hannibal, how *madly* he missed his face, the sound of his voice, the warmth of their bodies pressing together…everything so perfect about they way they had been. How was it possible that the love between them was all an illusion?

"Well, I get that; I know you must be eating pretty great every night of the week," Beverly laughed, smacking Will's arm lightly when he gave her a weird look. "Hey, get your head out of the gutter. I just mean, you told me you were going out with that chef guy. Caleb?"

"We've been on a handful of dates, it's nothing serious," Will said dismissively.

"I mean, is the whole chef thing too much? Is he kind of...like a poor man's Hannibal?"

"Remember when you told me to just *say*, if you were asking too many questions about my love life?" Will shot her an irritated glance.

"Sorry, it's just that...I'm still confused about why you and Hannibal broke up. You were so happy together."

"Nothing good lasts," Will said with a smile like a knife stab to his own gut.

“C’mon, that’s not true, look at me and Brian. I think we’re going to last. Look at Agent Crawford and his wife. It does happen sometimes. Have you thought about giving Hannibal another chance?”

“Why would you say that?” Will stopped short and rounded on her, maybe a little too aggressively. Confusion verging on fear flashed across her face and he shook his head. “I’m sorry. It’s just that all I want to *do* is be with him, but it was a toxic relationship. I still don’t want to talk about why; I barely even talk about it with my therapist. Trust me, Hannibal is not the solution, he’s the problem.”

“I only said it because I want you to be happy,” Beverly explained. “Will, you’ve been moping for months, agitated at the slightest little things, jumpy…I’m not saying you need a significant other to feel better because of course you don’t. But you need something to bring you peace of mind, even if you find it within yourself.”

“You’re right,” he realized. “I can’t keep living like this, it’s a waste of my time and energy. *Hannibal* is a waste of my time and energy, and if I can’t get over him, I’m letting him win, like he’s still controlling me. I’m going to this gala tonight.”

“Okay, that’s the spirit, I guess,” Beverly looked concerned at the way he’d made such an abrupt about-face. “Are you going to call Caleb?”

“I should,” he nodded, “He’s not a poor man’s Hannibal, he’s an actual nice guy. Maybe that’s something I should finally get to have in my life.” The words were bitter and sour on his tongue.

“Of course,” Beverly affirmed, “It’s what you deserve.”

The charity gala was held at an actual ballroom inside an impeccably maintained manor house which overlooked a famously remarkable garden. Will was infinitely glad no one was actually dancing, despite the string quartet, and that the assortment of deep-pocketed patrons of research, FBI supervisors, highly accomplished and respected psychiatrists, and mere grunts like Will himself were just standing around chatting. But this reprieve could only last so long. Soon, there would be dancing, because life was cruel.

“Here, let me,” Beverly said in greeting, adjusting Will’s crooked tie.

She looked amazing in a dark green, backless satin maxi dress; must have knocked Zeller’s socks off when he picked her up for their date tonight. Will remembered that feeling.

“Thanks,” he smiled. “Listen, I’m sorry I snapped at you earlier. I haven’t been a very good friend to you lately. You’re always there for me, and I’m just…”

Well, what? What was he, anyway?

“No, come on. Come here.” She pulled him into a hug. “You’re so hard on yourself, Will. It’s okay.”

“Alright, break it up,” Zeller interrupted, arriving on the scene with Price in tow.

Will laughed. “Hi, guys.”

That was when Caleb showed up, striding for them with a million kilowatt smile, looking like a model in his tux. Will felt that same disappointment hollowing him out all over again. He kept hoping one of these days he’d see Caleb, or anyone he went out with, and suddenly feel attraction again. He kept hoping that chemistry and romance weren’t feelings he’d lost the ability to touch for anyone but Hannibal.

On paper, this guy was perfect. He was good-looking, smart, accomplished, nice, charming...why didn’t it matter? It was like trying to get blood from a stone.

“Will,” Caleb grinned as they hugged hello. “I’m so happy you called me.”

He was happy all the time, apparently. Ceaselessly cheerful. Will had run into him at the supermarket a couple of months back and Caleb had been delighted to see him, almost immediately asking him if he happened to be single at present. Just being around Will seemed to be enough to keep him satisfied, and any little bit of encouragement Will showed got him all excited. If only he could give in, start something real, would it alleviate the pain and disappointment and guilt he felt?

“Who’s this guy?” Price asked, face contorted by suspicion. “Where’s Dr. Lecter?”

“Jimmy,” Beverly elbowed him, speaking through her teeth, “I told you they broke up.”

“No, they didn’t break up,” Zeller frowned.

“Yes they did,” Beverly insisted, “*months* ago!”

Will and Caleb stood there, statues in a display for the ages of what awkwardness looked like, as the three scientists continued debating.

“No! No, come on. I thought that was a joke. Graham, you guys didn’t really split?” Brian put a hand to his heart, crestfallen. “I think of you two as the main reason I was inspired to finally ask Beverly out -- you’re like the personification of true love.”

“Or, you know, *not*,” Caleb put in, finally mildly frustrated.

Will wondered if Caleb ever got fully angry. God, how he missed Hannibal’s temper.

“Brian, let it go, he doesn’t want to talk about it,” Beverly sighed. “So, you must be Caleb,” she added brightly, extending her hand to the newcomer.

“Well, *I* want to talk about it, what the hell happened?” Jimmy asked, continuing to regard Caleb as an interloper unworthy of consideration.

“It’s over, so there’s really nothing much to say,” Will lied as calmly as he could. “Hey, Jimmy, are those bacon-wrapped scallops over there?”

Jimmy immediately glanced to the array of food on the long buffet table behind them, around which waiters circulated with platters of champagne flutes.

“Oh! Those are my weakness,” Price exclaimed, making a beeline for the buffet.

“Count me in,” Zeller chimed in, but he paused before following his friend, turning back to Will. “I’m sorry we pried, it’s really none of our business.”

“It’s no problem,” Will shrugged, despite the myriad problems pressing in on him on all sides with breath-compressing force.

“We’ll give you guys some peace and quiet,” Beverly smiled, threading an arm through Brian’s as they got themselves some champagne and strolled off.

“Here you go,” Caleb smiled, passing Will a flute filled with sparkling alcohol. His green eyes widened when Will downed the drink in a single gulp. “Want another?”

“Hell, yes,” Will laughed, “Black tie functions are *not* my comfort zone.”

“Well that’s okay, just rely on me. I’m a small talk champion.” Caleb scanned the crowd of polite guests discerningly. “Why don’t you stay here, where it’s safe, and I’ll go make us both a plate. We can eat outside by the garden.”

“That sounds perfect,” Will agreed, because of course it did. He let the next glass of champagne flow straight down his throat before he looked across the room again, searching for Caleb’s reassuringly confident, fit figure.

Instead he found himself staring straight into Hannibal’s eyes. His ex stood across the room, looking like a god in his flawless tux, leveling Will with an intense, hungry gaze. Will’s lips fell softly open as his heart skipped a beat and he let out an involuntary sigh, lost in all the emotion crashing over him with that one simple look. Hannibal communicated endless details of bitterness, anger, excitement and obsessive lust without speaking a word or moving an inch.

His hair had grown slightly longer, brushing the collar of his jacket and falling in a deceptively gentle fringe across his forehead. Unlike his usual party behavior, he held up a wall much like Will did, unsmiling, intent, isolated from the friendly conversation buzzing around them. He seemed quite content to stare daggers into Will’s soul for the foreseeable future, and Will wondered when the ground beneath him had turned into quicksand.

He couldn’t tell how much time elapsed with them standing there at odds and inseparable; it could have been minutes, it could have been hours. But suddenly Caleb reappeared with a bright smile and two small plates laden with appetizers.

“I tried to get us a little bit of everything,” Caleb announced as he passed Will a plate. He nearly let the plate smash onto the floor, but managed to take it with fumbling fingers.

Will glanced across the room, only to find that Hannibal had vanished.

It wasn't the first time Hannibal had thought about killing Caleb Thornton, but it was certainly the most dedicated consideration he had applied to the concept. Having seen that impertinent man walk up to Will, *his* Will, placing a hand on his low back and passing him a plate of food -- having seen Caleb leading Will outside so that the two of them could be alone --

As if it was Caleb's place to take care of Will, Caleb's right to put his *hands* --

Hannibal waited a few beats before sleekly crossing the room to watch them through the large window by the entrance out onto the veranda. In those scant moments, he decided he would cut off Caleb's hands first, then rip out his tongue. Bore his eyeballs straight to the back of his skull for ever daring to so much as look at Will. He would dismantle Caleb piece by piece, applying vicious force, leaving not one single part of him intact. He would skin him with his teeth and pull out his entrails with his bare hands, and although Caleb deserved to suffer a slow death by careful torture, Hannibal would have no such patience. He would be a feral, unstoppable hunter, enacting a punishment that did not even come close to fitting the crime.

The curtains helped to conceal Hannibal as he peered through the space between them to see Caleb standing in the pleasantly warm early evening air, trading Will a satay kabob for a prosciutto-wrapped pear.

Will looked even more beautiful than he remembered, and the sight of him had brought Hannibal back to life after months of brooding stasis, biding his time and cultivating hatred towards his former lover, hatred which died on the vine every single day. He should despise Will for rejecting him, hurting him so thoroughly, decimating his pride and leaving him pathetic, humiliated and abandoned. Hannibal had stopped his game in time to save Will, had dared to open his heart to the man and show his whole self as he had allowed no one else to see him, and in turn Will chose to cast him aside as if all that they had meant nothing to him, as if Hannibal was so repulsive that he could never stand to be in his presence again.

Instead, as he examined Will's face from a distance, his heart bleated out countless embarrassing, pointless operettas of devotion, and he felt a curious sensation prickling all over his skin, which he soon realized was *concern*. While startlingly handsome, Will looked tired and thin; there were dark circles under his eyes still, even months after recovering from his illness. His eyes were wanly dim, his smile weak and forced. He couldn't be in love with Caleb, not looking like this.

It was confounding enough that Hannibal could look upon his former lover and still feel the urge to comfort and pamper him, even knowing that Will would regard such affections with complete disgust. It was still more bewildering that Will's uninspired, listless appearance filled Hannibal's foolish heart with hope. Will certainly hadn't displayed such apathy when he locked eyes with Hannibal.

Could it be that Will had changed his mind about him?

Chapter 15

Now rewind the tape back to the start
Said I'd never leave you but here we are
And you can't look at me now
I haven't changed, I'm still the same
But you can't look at me now
A hand grenade to throw away
-Caroline Polachek, “Look at Me Now”

“What is this, anyway?” Will asked, trying to distract himself by examining the bundle of meat, cheese and greens perched between his fingers.

“Ah, that’s a bresaola hand roll with arugula and, most likely, hmm, let me see…” Caleb took a small nibble of his own and added, “Yup, manchego. Spanish cheese and italian dried beef. Little bit of fig jam, good way to go. I might have to try making my own variation of this sometime.”

Will took a bite and thought it was just alright, but then it was an event for him lately if any morsel of food didn’t taste like ash. “So what’s the history behind this combination of ingredients? Seems unusual.”

“I...don’t know, it’s sort of like a charcuterie rolled up into a ball of yumminess,” Caleb chuckled. “Everyone loves a good cheese board with jam and garnishes.”

“But what region does manchego originate from?” Will blurted, unable to help himself. “How long does it age before it’s ready? How do they cure this type of beef?”

“Wow, I really haven’t got a clue,” said Caleb blithely, sipping his champagne. “I just love to make great food; I’m not sure what it goes through before it's in my hands. Is that a hobby of yours, learning about food history and all that?”

What was he *doing*? Without even realizing it, he was picking Caleb apart to show his comparative inferiority to Hannibal, which was exactly what Hannibal himself would do.

Will felt the wretched, slimy black grip of the wendigo’s claws around his heart and shook his head. “No, sorry, that was a weird tangent. It’s not a hobby of mine anymore, it only used to be.”

Will found himself mercifully alone again when Caleb excused himself to use the men’s room. A brief, but welcome respite from the necessity of trying to be human again, trying to have “fun.” Be normal. What if it was all overrated?

“It’s a lovely evening,” Hannibal said from behind him. A shiver went through Will’s body, as the simple greeting felt uncannily like a forbidden caress.

He turned to see Hannibal regarding him with an arch half-smile.

The sunset cast him in a haze of pink and gold light, and Will thought no one should ever look like that. After all this time, his fingertips ached to reach for him. The very blood pumping through his veins seemed to do so only in the insane aspiration that someday Hannibal would hold him again, kiss him slowly and deeply as he used to, make love to him with gentle comfort that unfurled into fierce, sweat-slicked fucking, the kind that left Will wrecked, speechless, only wanting more. No one should *feel* this way about someone else, crushed by a sick fixation and dependent on their presence to keep breathing.

Turning his gaze back to the lush gardens in front of him, where it was safe to look, Will nodded. “It’s alright.”

“It is, isn’t it? But you’re not.” Hannibal stood beside him, far enough away that Will couldn’t quite feel the heat of his body emanating from his skin, and the proximity combined with the denial almost killed him.

“You’ve grown skinny, Will. Have you been getting much sleep?”

Will laughed softly and dared to look at Hannibal’s regal profile, his eyes cast out over the verdant lawn stretching out to the woods beyond the gardens. Wildness beckoning at the horizon.

“How could I be?”

“Why should you be uneasy?” Hannibal shrugged, “Surely you’re not worried I’ll come after you, or even bother you. I will leave you now, if you like.”

“In a minute. No, I’m not...afraid of you. But what happened took a toll on me...I don’t think I ever got over the trauma.”

“Is that what it was? A trauma?” He tilted his head ever so slightly, his curiosity almost clinical. “Is that what I was?”

“I’m talking about the end result of our relationship. I suppose you’d rather I call it a self-awakening, right? To my true nature, the one I defy with such boring morality. That in seeing you fully, I had a chance to see me, and I threw it away.”

“Your words, not mine,” Hannibal answered. “But I certainly recognize how thoroughly you detest my views on the subject of your true nature. I understand how loathsome you find my nature.”

“Do you hate me for that?”

“I want to.”

“So why have you continued to obey me? I know you haven’t hurt anyone since I told you to stop. Surely you’re not that worried I’ll actually catch you. As you said, I may possess the superior technical prowess in a fight, but I ruin it by not enjoying murder. You might be able to take me down quite easily.”

“I’ve obeyed your edict because I would do anything you told me, Will. Anything.” Hannibal’s hands fisted atop the slender fence railing and he cast Will a hotly indignant glare.

“So you are with *him* now? Caleb Thornton?" Hannibal smirked, unable to mask his pain. "Looks like you wanted the Prince after all.”

“It’s nothing like that. We go out sometimes, but it’s not serious. It’s only…”

“Something Casual,” Hannibal guessed.

Will nodded stiffly. “I realized I’m not cut out for a serious relationship. Or maybe I can’t handle it.”

“Being in a serious relationship requires commitment,” Hannibal observed smoothly, tugging at the sleeves of his own jacket as if they actually needed straightening. “And endurance.”

“Didn’t I *endure* enough at your hands? I’m so sorry I couldn’t handle the whole truth, just acclimate to your extracurricular activities and everything you did, and were willing to do to me, so you could protect your own concerns. How disappointing for you.”

“How disappointing. Love is not what I expected it to be. I don’t think I’m cut out for it any more than you are.”

Will looked up into Hannibal’s eyes as the other man leaned just a little closer, and Will could feel it now, the waft of natural heat radiating as it always did, along with the heady scent of manly, expensive cologne. He felt like he was involuntarily high, shifting closer out of irresistible, magnetic instinct. Their fingers inched a tiny bit closer on the railing, and Hannibal murmured, “I hope you’ll be happy again someday.”

It was grotesquely insincere. Hannibal didn’t want Will happy unless it was with him, and they both knew it. But the transparent selfishness in the false platitude only made him want to grab Hannibal into a hard, angry kiss.

“Dr. Lecter,” Caleb said, looking more serious than usual when he returned to find his date having hateful eye sex with his former boyfriend.

“Good evening,” Hannibal said with a reptilian smile.

He walked off across the lawn, cut around the house and disappeared. Will heard the distinctively clear, smooth sound of the Bentley’s engine starting up soon afterwards.

“So that’s why you finally called me again, after basically ghosting me for weeks,” Caleb scowled.

So he did go past frustration sometimes. Right now, he looked really annoyed and definitely offended, but Will only found it tiresome.

“What?”

“I like you, Will, and I’ve made that pretty clear,” Caleb went on, bristling at Will’s pretense of ignorance. “In fact, I think you’re amazing, and I have thought that from the first moment I ever saw you.”

Will blushed, “I’m sorry--”

“No you’re not. You got exactly what you wanted. That man looked like he was going out of his damn mind with jealousy.”

Will raised his eyebrows, his heart lifting. “He did?”

“He was practically foaming at the mouth. Here’s the problem, Will, I’ll put up with a lot, but I don’t like being used. Why don’t you call me sometime if you ever figure out what you want?”

Caleb walked away, leaving Will unmoored from himself. He felt somehow he was still standing with Hannibal, hearing him say he’d do anything Will asked.

Will’s profile on the Ripper had been exceptionally accurate. He knew exactly why Hannibal enjoyed killing, the savage thrill of the hunt, the hedonistic delights of feasting on a kill, the satisfaction of demonstrating his superiority and conquering of those who had offended him with their rudeness. Hannibal made the world a little more beautiful every single time he killed. He wiped the terrain clean of crude idiocy and replaced it with gorgeously evocative tableaus, grisy and unforgettable art, slick with the blood of passionate, exuberant celebration.

Yet he had given it up for Will. He had kept out of Will’s way until their paths crossed organically. And even then, he walked away so calmly. The gears twisted inside Will, and he hated that Hannibal found it so easy to leave him again.

It seemed like a really great time to get drunk.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Chapter specific trigger warning: brief mention of suicidal thoughts

You know you got me in the palm of your hand
But I love those hands -- Lauv ft. Lany, "Mean it"

Hannibal heard a strange shuffling noise outside his door later that night and paused in the front hall. After a few hours spent pacing, trying to draw, trying to read, and ultimately staring straight ahead of him obsessing over every detail of seeing Will again, he'd resolved to go to bed.

Assuming it might be a raccoon or squirrel to be shooed away, he opened the door and found his guess had not been far off the mark.

Will Graham stood there, swaying on his feet, eyes red-rimmed and curls deliciously mussed. He was sans jacket, his tie hanging loose around his crooked collar, one sleeve rolled up to his elbow, the other unbuttoned at his wrist.

"You missed the dancing. By the way, what the hell is *that*?" he asked, pointing at the "For Sale" sign on Hannibal's lawn and nearly toppling over in the process.

"You're drunk," Hannibal said curtly, using disapproval to mask his euphoria at Will's presence. He steadied Will, and the feeling of placing his hands on Will's shoulders again made him slightly dizzy.

"Asked you a question," Will answered, stubborn to the last. He pouted as Hannibal released him, satisfied he could stand independently for the moment. "Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Although I cannot imagine why you are here, please do come in," he responded, striding fluidly to the study, where he flicked the lamps back on and Will flopped into an armchair as if he owned the place.

"You said you would always be waiting for me to come to you," Will said, slurring every word. "But you're leaving."

"I should have thought you'd be elated. Do you need reminding of some of the charming things you said to me at the hospital? I make you sicker than any fever ever could." His lips curved in a mocking smile.

"Don't be so fucking condescending. *Jesus.* Just tell me why you're really leaving." Will took his head in his hands and shook slightly, and Hannibal frowned, resentfully covering his

shoulders with a blanket.

He left the room and came back with a tall glass of water. “It’s particularly idiotic to become inebriated on champagne,” he chided. “The sugar will make your hangover even worse.”

Will took a sip and looked down at Hannibal, who knelt on the floor before him, having unintentionally slipped into a devotional posture. “Why are you leaving?”

“Why are you here?”

Will cupped Hannibal’s face, the gesture clumsy but infinitely sentimental. With equal clumsiness, he drew Hannibal in for a lop-sided kiss, his beautiful mouth burning against Hannibal like a starving man.

“I bet you’re a great dancer,” Will smiled, tenderness spreading like tendrils of light in the air between them.

“No,” Hannibal said firmly, pressing a reluctant hand to Will’s chest to free himself of the embrace. He stood, straightening his soft red sweater with as much pride as he could muster, considering he was also wearing striped pajama pants. “You don’t get to do this, Will, turn up drunk and toy with my emotions. You don’t have the right.”

“I’ve got to be *crazy*,” Will gesticulated his hands wildly, pulling a distorted face, “ just like you said, or I wouldn’t try, even drunk.” His face fell into a sad smile. “Heh.”

“I never said you were crazy, Will; I said you had a radiance, a righteous power inside you which you keep subjugating with things in your life that make you unhappy.”

“Right, but you *are* crazy. Serial killer. Cannibal. Crazy. Doesn’t that kind of go with the territory?”

“Not always.” A coy smile this time. Hannibal sat in the chair across from him and dropped his hands between his knees, leaning forward the way he always did when Will had him especially intrigued. “Do you really find it so horrible, what I used to do?”

“Wish I did. Tried to. But no, I think in a way it’s awful, that you stopped.” Will tipped his head backwards. “If you really wanna talk about what I said in the hospital, maybe consider I was still slightly dish-oriententated--”

“Oh?” Hannibal couldn’t hold back a small smile. “Were you?”

“Yes. I’d also just found out you let me be sick, you wanted to frame me for your murder spree--”

“So was the murder spree itself less an issue than the fact that I was prepared to let you take the fall for it?”

“My *job* was to figure you out, stare into all those elaborate *tabeaus* you left behind and find you. After a while, I found myself there, and…” He tilted his hand from side to side, then let it drop. “That was a little scary. A little guilty, realizing that I’d begun looking *forward* to the

next Ripper rounder." He had fun with the alliterated "r"'s emphasizing each one with a small growl. "I wanted to see...what you would do. It fucks with your head, something like that."

"If you let it. It's a lot of work, smothering instinct with a misplaced sense of duty."

"It's not like you're so honest. You never told me about what happened to Misch...Mischa," Will said, and it was hard work to make any words come out right. He curled up with his knees to his chest, compressing himself into the leather of the chair. Hannibal went on staring at him, this time caught off guard. "I looked up every scrap of information I could find on you."

"I don't often speak of what befell my sister. Had we continued growing closer, one day I would have told you."

"Hmm. Used to think you were lying, when you talked about having a lonely childhood, like you just wanted us aligned like that so you could worm your way past my defenses."

"I do tell the truth sometimes."

"When it suits you. Even when you confessed your sins to me, you didn't tell me the 'why you got this way' part."

"There isn't a why, Will. What happened happened, and so did I."

"You're still afraid to let me see all of you, and going by your diagnosis, Doctor, I'm afraid to see myself. Quite the pair, aren't we?"

Hannibal frowned. As if there was a difference, between Will seeing himself and seeing Hannibal. As if the looking glass between them was anything other than a gate to completion.

"Did you tell Caleb the truth?" he asked sternly, "Or some version of it, regarding our relationship, and why it ended?"

"God, you're so worried about me and Caleb." Will rolled his eyes, standing up and clearly fighting a wave of nausea as he clutched the back of the chair.

"Well," he pointed at Hannibal, speaking sing-song. "He's not even my *boyfriend*. We haven't had *sex*."

"You're an endearingly childish drunk," Hannibal observed. Venom crept into his next statement: "Still, he's kissed your lips."

"Yeah."

Hannibal stood and turned away, staring instead at the reflection of Will's bleary eyes and lovely, glistening lips in the glass door of the antique cabinet filled with exotic, beautiful trinkets from his travels.

"He's had his hands on your body," Hannibal added with a throaty rumble.

“Yes, a few times,” said Will.

Hannibal punched right through the glass on the cabinet door, then used his curled-up hand to crash down through every glass shelf in progression, until the little figurines, painted fans, elegant statues and other curiosities lay under a heap of countless shards.

“Hannibal,” Will sighed, coming up behind him, reaching out to cup Hannibal’s blood-streaked hand. “Let me help you with this, it’ll be all full of glass.”

“I don’t need your help,” Hannibal hissed, taking his hand back, “Leave me alone in my miserable embarrassment. My only consolation is you’re likely too drunk to remember this in the morning.”

“Hannibal.” Will smiled and kissed all over Hannibal’s hand, smearing his face with blood.

“You’ll cut yourself.”

“I don’t care. When I was with Caleb, I pretended it was you. Every time. I didn’t want to but I couldn’t help it.”

“The trouble is that you didn’t want to.”

Hannibal stared aghast at Will’s red, luscious lips and the pleading glimmer in his eyes, which were velvety green in the lamplight. Everything about Will was a tease, much like the preposterous idea of someone who could understand Hannibal; but Will’s empathy didn’t guarantee forgiveness, nor acceptance. Hannibal could not rid himself of the continual echo of Will’s voice saying he hated him. He could not lay himself open to rejection again. It was better he should leave this place and start anew, try to restore his autonomy.

“You have a chameleon's eyes,” Hannibal murmured. “I can’t trust any emotion I see in them; I’m not even sure you can from one moment to the next. Come with me.”

He paused in the bathroom to wrap a towel around the injured hand for now, and brought out a warm, wet cloth with which he attentively wiped the blood from Will’s lips. Then he took Will to his bed and pulled down the duvet. “I’ll take the couch. Make sure you sleep on your stomach.”

Will flopped down face-first on the bed and wriggled his shoes off. “Caleb figured out I was using him to make you jealous.” He spoke into the pillow his face was crushed into, and Hannibal paused in the doorway with a resumed veneer of calm. “Which is pretty funny, because I didn’t realize that myself until he told me. I was hoping I’d see you tonight.”

“Shouldn’t you be off consoling Caleb then, apologizing for such manipulation, instead of coming here?”

“I probably should be.” Will closed his eyes.

“What did you want me to feel, seeing you with him? Jealousy? Anger? Heartbreak? Haven’t I already endured enough for you?”

“God, no. Never enough. I just want your emotion poured out all over me, I don’t care what it is as long as it’s honest. And I don’t need to trust you to want you.”

“Goodnight, Will,” Hannibal murmured, closing the door behind him.

He cleaned up with the first aid kit in the kitchen, enjoying the stabs of pain from the antiseptic seeping into the cuts all over his fingers and palms, across the backs of his hands, whisking away the tiny fragments of slivered glass. It blotted out the longing for Will, just for a split second, every time he made a pass across his wounds with the alcohol wipes, when all he could process was pain. For the very first time, he understood on a personal level why some people chose to take their own lives.

This was unthinkable, but here he was thinking it. Always he had been the predator, and even now common sense dictated that he should end this insulting tug of war at once and kill Will, eat him, have it done with.

Instead he was sleeping on the couch, and Will got the bed.

Yes, here he was: the prey. He didn’t take Will’s life, not because he didn’t want to, but because it was a short term solution to a much deeper problem. He would be left with nothing but memories of Will’s smiles, from the shyest to the most wicked, and the million tiny nuances of mind, heart and soul that defined the man. Glass dotting a wound that would never heal.

The memories were hard enough to bear while knowing there was at least some chance to see Will again.

So he held on. Refusing, in fact, to let go of that last frail lifeline of hope tethering him to this mortal realm. In spite of his plans to move on, in spite of the “for sale” sign, in every way that counted he would always be waiting for Will.

The game had altered course again, and Hannibal knew he must devise a new strategy.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Chapter specific trigger warning: mentions of disinterest and difficulty in eating

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"If we're not gonna do this honestly
Baby, won't you give me back what you took apart?"
-Niall Horan, “Arms of a Stranger”

When Will woke up in the morning, it was to the worst hangover of his life, nearly crippling him with a brutal headache and the need to vomit incessantly in Hannibal’s master bathroom.

He was alone in the house; Hannibal had left a bottle of aspirin and a fresh glass of water on the bedside table, along with a note informing him there was coffee in the kitchen as well as food in the fridge, and to lock the door on his way out.

How strange, to wake up alone and sick in the bed where they had made love so many times, the bed where they had snuggled up together. Hannibal’s side of the bed felt cold, but Will didn’t care. Every time he stumbled back after a vomiting session, he clutched Hannibal’s pillow, moaning softly as he mouthed at it and rubbed his cheek against it, then inhaled deeply, feeling his body pressed into the same place where Hannibal’s rested every night. The silky sheets were covered in that gorgeous scent of his cologne, mingling cedar-wood, mandarin, nutmeg, jasmine and thyme. He knew how the smell combined with the natural musk and sweat of Hannibal, who ran nearly as hot sometimes as Will did himself. Will smiled at the memory: Hannibal heated up like an oven when he was aroused, and stayed that way for a while after sex. They never minded, even when they really should want to separate in the night to their own sides of the bed because they were both overheated and flushed; instead they just held on tighter. Any circumstance which ought to divide them only seemed to make them defiant about being as close as humanly possible, trying to find ways to be even closer, trying to invent a love that had no earthly precedent.

Vividly, he could recall the sensation of those big, strong arms encircling him from behind as he lay on his side, faint murmured greetings of a new day wafting over his ear in Lithuanian and French, along with the sweet scrape of stubble. It was early, and Hannibal didn’t shave until after breakfast.

“I think you should grow a beard,” Will had smiled one morning as the bristly scruff rubbed into his neck, where Hannibal peppered languid kisses. “I’d love to feel it all over me.”

“Mylimasis,” Hannibal sighed, biting his skin, gliding his hips up to firmly press his erection against Will’s ass, “Do you have any idea what you do to me?”

Eventually, Will felt better and compelled to return to the here and now, much to his regret. He missed the feeling that it was okay to be in love with Hannibal. What a simple thing to miss, but how completely the loss of it had ruined his life.

Will managed a quick shower, then wandered back into Hannibal's room, safe in the knowledge that he must have gone to work, or just about anywhere as an excuse not to be here, and he wouldn't be back anytime soon.

Of course he was avoiding Will; it was exactly what Will had asked him to do. So why did it hurt so much?

Will opened Hannibal's wardrobe and then buried his face in the first shirt he came to. He pulled it off the hanger like it was a life preserver and shrugged it on. He found a pair of charcoal grey trousers and put them on, too, followed by a belt which he knotted almost to the limit to keep the pants up around his waist.

In the mirror, he looked somewhat absurd, his hair dripping wet, the clothes too baggy. He was pale from the hangover, and now he saw with fresh realness how much weight he had lost recently. Sometimes these days he would suddenly feel faint and grab for a banana or some crackers, anything he could randomly find in the kitchen, realizing he'd forgotten to eat again. It was hard to eat when you'd lost the ability to taste anything and register it as good, as a form of pleasure rather than an afterthought of sustenance.

But standing there now, despite the raging headache which the aspirin had failed to defeat and the confused growl in his empty stomach, he felt good, he felt at home. All dressed up in Hannibal.

He noticed the journal sitting on Hannibal's bureau and picked it up without slowing down to think. He flipped through the pages, figuring what was one more transgression over the boundaries between them, when Hannibal had been inside his head laying traps to keep him ill and lead him into a cell? He deserved a glimpse into Hannibal's mind, as an act of reciprocity.

But that wasn't why he wanted to know.

His fingers stroked lovingly over the precious, cramped rows of perfect writing, but he couldn't make out a single word. The entire diary was written in some sort of code that looked like a mathematical formula. He took a picture of one page with his phone and figured he could try and crack it later. What else did he have to do? Make up more lies that there was anything else on his mind?

Will gave a small startle of alarm as he finally regained enough of his senses to remember the dogs. He vaguely remembered taking an Uber here last night, so he had to do the same thing to get home.

On his way out, he stopped by the study, where all the glass had been neatly swept away, the cabinet and its shattered contents gone. In spite of Hannibal's hope he would forget, he remembered that powerful fist colliding with the delicate glass and china that characterized the killer's carefully protected, ever-elegant existence.

He remembered that he had brought Hannibal to a place of human devastation, and wondered what he should do with that power. What would he let himself do?

Abigail was sitting out on the porch when he got home, and the dogs were enjoying a mid-morning nap, encircling her chair with familial comfort. Hannibal must have contacted her last night, knowing she had a key to Will's house, which Will had given her in case she ever needed a place to crash. She had her own little apartment now, but she was lonely and restless, and the dogs were good for her.

"I should have known he would tell you to look after them," Will nodded in greeting as Abigail looked him up and down, confusion crinkling her nose and narrowing her eyes.

"What the hell are you wearing?"

"Never mind," Will sighed, "Are you hungry? I think I can stomach some toast by now. It was a rough night. Please, remember never to drink alcohol, *ever*."

"Oh right," she rolled her eyes, "I'll get right on that."

"So, anything else on your mind?" Will asked as they walked across the fields a short while later, the dogs running all around, loving the combination of a slightly brisk breeze and resplendent sunlight beaming down from a gentle blue sky.

When they reached the river banks, it was to find that the cold, straw-yellow grass had morphed, seemingly overnight, into lively green blades, and the sunlight sparkled fondly off the coursing ripples in the water. All around them, the air was vibrantly alive with chirping and flutters, with the soft splash of an occasional fish daring above the currants to dive back in, as if all of nature had decided to relish this season of revival.

"I wanted to ask your advice about the book proposal," Abigail explained as they paused by the stream to admire the cardinals, bluebirds and sparrows flitting around tree branches sprouting fresh buds that would soon verge into leaves. "And I've also been wondering how you're doing. We haven't talked that much lately."

"Were you worried?" He was flattered, given that he often felt Abigail's affection like a delicate catch he didn't want to reel in. He wanted to let her come to him, when it felt right, when she needed his guidance and companionship. Maybe he should have checked in on her more often, but he didn't want to intrude.

"I've *been* worried, and neither one of you will talk to me about the other. It's weird enough for Hannibal to shut up about anything, never mind his favorite subject: you." She shrugged, tossing a branch for Winston to chase. "My parents weren't the most stable, but at least they never got divorced. I don't like the way it feels."

“Hannibal and I were never married,” Will bit his lip. *Married.* Even in their happiest moments, he’d scarcely dared to hope for something like that. “Do you feel like we’ve been putting you in the middle?”

“When I first met you two, you were inseparable. It was obnoxious, but you were in love. It was really nice to see. Now I don’t know what you are.”

“You know what Hannibal is. And that’s okay with you?”

“Took you long enough to ask that. Are you really that surprised, though? It’s not alien to me, it’s something I understand. I can relate to it.”

“That doesn’t make it okay,” he sighed, rubbing his eyes. Where to begin, how could he convince her that Hannibal was a bad influence when she’d been raised to see murder as normal, and when he wasn’t even that great at convincing himself on the subject? He knew Hannibal was a bad influence, but in weak moments he just didn’t care.

“I trust Hannibal,” Abigail maintained, “and I know he’ll always protect me, just like you.”

Will smiled, amazed at her unflappable trust. “You really are becoming his daughter.”

Abigail reached down to pet Zoe and Buster when they both jumped up on her legs, vying for her attention. “I’m becoming *your* daughter too, you know. I had a new family that felt just right, and it’s already falling apart. Is that all families ever do?”

“I hope not. I really wouldn’t know.”

She gave him a wry half-smile. “I guess we can find out together.”

“Maybe even hope for the best?” He pulled a face as if this was the craziest notion ever, and Abigail laughed, a lovely, rare, musical laugh.

“Freddie sent over a new outline for the book. Will you read it over and let me know what you think?”

“I’m sure you’ve shown it to Hannibal.” Will fixated on a new bunch of wild blue phlox just ahead of them, the indigo petals bobbing gracefully in the breeze. “What did he think?”

“He called it a doomed collection of vulgar tripe,” Abigail revealed, and Will couldn’t help breaking out in a sunny grin, laughing as he pictured the eloquently irritated expression that must have been on Hannibal’s face when he said that.

“And he suggested I find another publisher and write the entire book myself, with his and your guidance,” Abigail continued. “But I’ve already signed a contract with Freddie.”

Will looked at her discerningly. “We can get you out of that.”

***

“I think I’m ready to talk about Hannibal,” Will announced.

Bedelia cocked her head, an automaton version of bemused. “It would be better to be sure.”

“Okay, I *want* to talk about Hannibal.” Will chuckled darkly. “He’d be thrilled.”

“Was it his ego that drove the two of you apart?” Bedelia guessed, crossing her legs and resting one slender finger to the side of her alabaster face.

“No,” and it came out softer than he expected. “No, I always thought his ego was endearing. It’s just a suit of armor to cover everything he’s afraid of, underneath, the part of him I loved the most. I loved the truth of him, but he didn’t want to share it with me unless it was on his terms. His *terms* were not healthy.”

“It’s brave and incredibly difficult to extricate oneself from a relationship that is no longer healthy or productive.” Bedelia pursed her lips. “Yet you have not confronted the emotional residue of this parting from Hannibal.”

“No, I tried to run as far away from *dealing* with it as I possibly could, but I only ended up right back where I started.” He twisted his tangled fingers in his lap and tried to relax his tensed jaw, tried to control the trembling in his body when he thought about all of this.

“There’s a part of me that’s still trapped, like a bug in a spider’s web, in the trauma of realizing how many times Hannibal lied to me. And...because I had been used and thrown away in pretty much every other attempted relationship I’d ever had, I immediately assumed that this was a sequel repeating the same pattern. I felt so far beyond foolish, again proved to be a waste of space, special to no one. I didn’t want to face that Hannibal had different reasons for lying to me, or that his love for me was genuine. I still struggle with that.”

“Where did you run,” Bedelia inquired, “When you tried to avoid dealing with it?”

“I dated someone else, someone who deserved better than what I had left to offer. He was a complete sweetheart, crazy about me, and I behaved the same way I had hated being treated in the past, only contacting him when it was convenient to me, always one foot out the door but never saying so -- I still owe him a massive apology.”

“You are not always going to know what you want or need at the same moment that someone else knows what they want or need from you,” Bedelia reasoned. “Surely you are entitled to the occasional dating blunder, which is part and parcel of the entire undertaking. Dating is, by its very nature, awkward. A collision of two people attempting to learn if their pieces were designed to fit together, and most often a distastefully managed communication afterwards, intimating that the interest has died off.”

Will tried to imagine Bedelia Du Maurier dating and could only picture candlelit dinners between her and a doppelganger of herself. He put the image out of his mind before he started to laugh, because actually she was really helping him here.

“If I start to forgive myself, I might start to forgive Hannibal.”

“Would that be so terrible, really?” She arched a brow. “Forgiveness is often a gift we give ourselves, a release of burdensome negative energy.”

“Hannibal is capable of doing things that…” He took a shaky breath and corrected himself, “Hannibal is *fond* of doing things that scare me.”

Perhaps just as worrisome was the fact that when he said this, Bedelia did not look surprised in the least. What was *that* about?

“If you forgive him, do you feel you would also be condoning his actions?”

“Deep down, I like them, but his habits are very, very wrong” Will sighed, his heart heavy and aching to simply, finally give in. “If I forgive him, I’ll go back to him, and I know I shouldn’t. I should be alone or find someone *good.* I don’t know who I’ll become if I’m with him, but it won’t be this. It will be someone new.”

“Good and bad are flimsy binary assumptions. You might consider, instead, who or what is good for you.”

“Hannibal wasn’t good for you, was he? As a friend or a patient.”

“He was never my friend, but my professional associate.” She smoothed out her dove grey skirt and smiled. “And no, he wasn’t good for me. But I am not you.”

Chapter End Notes

Will needed a chapter to think. <3 Hannibal will be back in the next one...and he's been scheming again ;)

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

”Doesn't feel right
Can you take me home?
Play me all night
With you I'm alone
All I wanna hear
All I wanna hear
All I wanna hear
Is baby, you were right”
-Cxloe, “U Were Right”

The note arrived in Will’s mailbox one morning soon after, enclosed in the instantly familiar creamy, thick stationary envelope which he nearly dropped on the ground in his excitement.

Tearing it open as he stood barefoot in his boxers on the porch, he stared down at the simple words on the notecard:

Do you like to watch, Will?

Underneath this, Hannibal had included an address in Baltimore, followed by

“Midnight.”

Will gave Winston a baffled look, and the dog blinked back at him unconcerned, waiting for his breakfast. “What the hell? I need another coffee to figure this out, come on guys.”

He stood in the kitchen, sipping his coarse black coffee from the half-dead old Mr. Coffee he kept forgetting to replace and took comfort from the sounds of the dogs merrily scarfing down the homemade meal he had just served them. He hadn’t come any closer to figuring the note out; he didn’t have enough to go on.

“What do you think, should I go?” Will asked, turning the invitation around and around, passing it between his fingers, uncertain if it represented a secret treat, a threat, or possibly both.

Buster gave a sharp bark, but the rest of the dogs just kept eating, not manifesting the slightest opinion on the topic. Obviously, he wasn’t going to do anything sensible, such as calling Bedelia to ask what she thought. She was the only person aside from Abigail who could even remotely intuit the severity of Hannibal’s “unhealthy” proclivities (God knows how much she had seen of Hannibal’s true nature; one shuddered to think, as profoundly careful as she was when treading the topic). And as his therapist, she would be an appropriate person to seek guidance from. But he didn’t feel like it.

He might have called Beverly and given her some vague version of the scenario, gleaned some useful insight even if she didn't know the whole story, but again, he found the idea empty of purpose. No point asking Abigail, who would obviously encourage him to go. She'd light up like Hayley Mills in *The Parent Trap*.

He wanted to trust himself to make this decision; he wanted to be strong in his own sense of purposeful pursuit, the design of his destiny. And how could he *not* go? At the very least, he had to make sure Hannibal wasn't getting up to any nonsense -- well, okay, this was definitely going to be some nonsense. He had to make sure Hannibal wasn't planning to commit any crimes. That was better, and would serve as a perfectly good excuse.

It turned out to be one of those absolutely ridiculous and terrible *clubs* where people voluntarily flocked to cram themselves onto claustrophobic dancefloors under strobing lights and jump around like electrified chickens to ear-assaulting techno music, usually out of their minds on ecstasy or just too drunk to realize how gross it all was. Will got as far as the entrance before he nearly turned around and ran, but the security guy at the door interrupted his escape.

"Hey, good-looking, aren't you coming in? You cut the line, but for you I'll make an exception."

Will glanced from the hulking, looming doorman to the garish, green light and clouds of smoke emanating from inside the club. He could run away now and spare himself the mortification of *everything* a place like this represented, but then he'd never know why the hell Hannibal had summoned him here. Curiosity got the best of him.

"Okay," he shrugged, shuffling towards the entrance.

"Hold up, you have to get rid of that god-awful flannel first," the doorman insisted, holding out his hand.

Will glanced down at his trademark blue plaid shirt. "How will I get it back?"

"Please just let me put it in my coat check back here," the man replied, nodding at the garbage can a few feet away. "Trust me, I'm doing you a massive favor."

Will shucked off the flannel and headed inside, now down to his black t-shirt and jeans. Who the hell knew what to wear to a nightmare disaster zone like this anyway? He winced as throbbing bass immediately attacked him, along with light beams of alternating color, texture and pattern. Fuck whatever Hannibal had already done to his brain; this was psychic driving at its most maniacal.

The petite, purple-mohawked bartender did a double-take when Will requested a beer, like the request came in a foreign language she didn't understand. No one ordered a beer in a place like this. Of course, he had to shout at the top of his lungs several times to even be heard.

All around him, people were downing shots like they were water, and a short distance away there was an enormous crowd indulging in dirty dance shenanigans like the sad stereotype and commentary on society they were. No one wanted to get close like this unless they couldn't hear or even really see each other.

"It's on me," the bartender mouthed with a wink, passing him the beer which he chugged gratefully. His resolve to never get drunk again was quickly evaporating as it seemed the only real way to survive this situation.

It then occurred to him that this was an incredibly bizarre place for Hannibal to choose, even for himself. What was Hannibal going to do, walk in here with his fancy bespoke plaid suit and shiny dress shoes? Will laughed at the thought, licking the foam from his lips just before he saw a familiar figure in the heap of uncoordinated fools dance-humping in front of him. He choked on his next sip and patted at his chest, setting the beer down on the bar behind him with trembling fingers.

Hannibal was right at the center of the dancefloor, illuminated only every minute or so by the light beams which occasionally shuddered out altogether to blacklight or smoke. Everytime he reappeared, highlighted in neon green or acid purple, Will noticed something else -- first, the leather jacket, t-shirt and snug-fitting black trousers, complete with black leather gloves. Then how completely natural Hannibal looked, moving to the beat with sinuous ease, far from the awkward old guy at the club; more like the immediate star. When he imagined Hannibal as an outstanding dancer, Will had always visualized a waltz, not this descent into sinful grinding which undulated from fast to slow and back again in some magical, ineffable flow which Will couldn't remotely fathom. Men and women alike gazed at Hannibal in automatic infatuation, but finally one dancer in particular seemed to catch Hannibal's notice.

As Hannibal took a lithe young brunette woman in a sleek black minidress by the hips and pulled her back against his stomach, he vanished again in a voluminous cloud of smoke and glittering light suddenly changing from vivid blue to near-black.

Shimmering now in lavender beams, Hannibal's partner reached behind her to clasp Hannibal's head, running her fingers through his silvery hair, which tonight he had left unstyled, lustrous and shaggy. Will wanted nothing more than to charge right through the fray and break her hands, but he wasn't going to give Hannibal the satisfaction of knowing that his attempts to make Will jealous had succeeded. At that moment, the woman grinned, sliding her ass against Hannibal's groin, and Will recognized her.

It was Astrid Clarke, a suspect from a murder case Will had solved months ago -- solved, but couldn't close due to insufficient evidence to make the arrest. Astrid had murdered her sister just to get the family inheritance, and had smirkingly flouted her ability to evade charges. Jack said there was nothing they could do, and Will's hands had formed tight fists, his heart hardening into a resolve to do something himself -- but he talked himself out of it, of course --

He had told Hannibal about the case back when they were dating. And now, finally, Will understood what this evening was really about. Astrid was a horrific excuse for a human being. She'd deprived two young children of their mother and an already grieving family of its backbone for no other reason than money to fund her own capricious whims of cocaine

and luxury living. Anger solidified in Will's gut, warring with the churn of jealousy until his head spun. But the superficial, kneejerk jealousy was only a bonus feature of Hannibal's plan, not the main event.

The words from Hannibal's note whispered through his skull, wendigo claws stroking in a wickedly beckoning caress, the most delicious scratching across his consciousness.

Do you like to watch?

Hannibal pulled out a small, curved dagger, unseen by anyone else in the sweaty den of cloudy light and shadow. He placed his palm on Astrid's belly, spreading his fingers wide to hold her in place, and looked up into Will's eyes with a surprisingly gentle smile. He was waiting for Will's approval. He would not hurt her, unless Will said he should. Otherwise, he would hold to the promise he'd made Will in the hospital.

Will felt frozen in time, staring as Hannibal lifted the knife, slowly approaching Astrid's throat. She finally noticed, so he moved his free arm to her mouth, silencing her and trapping her in a headlock all in one go. Before Will knew what he was doing, he shot Hannibal a devilishly intent look as something new broke free inside him, bursting like antlers from his skull, majestic and proud. Will nodded.

Hannibal slit Astrid's throat in a clean, smooth line designed for a slow bleed. Muffling her cries, he put his knife away and deftly conveyed her to the ladies room with complete nonchalance, his actions still almost invisible to anyone but Will because they seemed common, unimportant. It only looked like Hannibal was helping a drunk friend to the restroom.

Will stood there for a moment with the room swaying all around him in a toxic neon blur, guilt and ecstasy grappling for control of his perceptions. He tried and failed to catch his breath as his heart slammed his ribcage, riotous and delighted, exhilarated and terrified. So wrong, so horribly wrong; he'd just...what had Will just done? Hannibal had offered his hands to let Will commit murder, and Will had said *yes*, and now he was half hard in his jeans, blood pumping hot and virile through his veins, feeling drugged by pure, reckless joy such as he could never have fathomed. The guilt tried to seep in through the tiny cracks in his happiness, but it wasn't enough to taint the moment.

Hannibal was his humble servant, his hunter, his proxy. Astrid deserved to be wiped off the face of the earth and just that easily, it was done.

Will waited outside the ladies room, where Hannibal reemerged with his leather jacket zipped over his shirt. He was still wearing the gloves, which he had presumably given a quick but expert cleaning. Astrid's corpse would be locked in a stall, Will guessed, and even the slow pool of blood would be hard to make out in the dark, huge bathroom, given the added factor that almost everyone here was wasted on drugs and-or alcohol. It might be a while before anyone found her, and there would be no prints, no evidence to trace the crime back to Hannibal.

"Why?" Will asked, and Hannibal gave him that same patient smile, his eyes soft and open.

He took Will's hand and led him with smooth confidence to the sea of dancers. After firmly pulling Will's hips to his, he leaned into his ear, his breath warm and tickling, spine-tingling. "You know why. I want you to meet me where I am."

Will nodded, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's neck, leaning in to smell the blood on his shirt, soaking through to his chest, tangy-sweet and dizzying. He laid his head on Hannibal's shoulder and they swayed just as languidly as if a ballad had been playing, a love song only they could hear, an ode to ritual and a celebration of a rite of passage. But this rite was not the endgame; it was only the next step in a journey which Will had embarked upon at Hannibal's invitation, never fully acknowledging it to himself until now. It was a one-way journey with no turning back. Will's innocence was gone forever.

Killing Astrid with Hannibal felt like breathing flesh onto bones left brittle by months of wandering in a dense fog of depression and self-denial. Will was alive again. If he regretted anything, it was that in letting his morality slip away like an extraneous second skin, he didn't feel more regret.

They couldn't linger long; just another few minutes wrapped up tight together, Will pressing soft kisses all over Hannibal's neck and upper chest, Hannibal's hands wandering Will's body, from his back down to his hips, then possessively groping his ass. Will moaned and the music swallowed it up.

"I don't know what to do," Will admitted when they slipped out the back door, finding themselves in a narrow alley.

"Firstly, let me get you away from here. There could be rodents. This is most certainly not my preferred part of town." Hannibal took Will's hand and brought him to a motorcycle parked a few spaces down from the club's front entrance.

"Hannibal," Will persisted as Hannibal passed him a helmet. He held it in his hands, twisting at the strap restlessly. "I should call Jack right now, turn both of us in."

"If you like," Hannibal nodded, unperturbed. "Or we can go for a ride. It's a beautiful night."

Will looked up at the star-spilled black sky overhead, and the immensity of the full moon. "Yes, it is."

He let Hannibal fasten the helmet strap under his chin, smiling down at him with infinite fondness.

Will smiled back, unable to help himself. "I guess if I was going to start getting over what you just did, I might ask you when you bought a midlife crisis motorcycle or started wearing leather."

"You mean, what *we* just did," said Hannibal, calmly putting his own helmet on.

"What we...just did," Will allowed in a halting breath.

“Are you out of sorts, or are you happy? Even as well as I know you, my darling, at this moment I cannot quite tell.”

“I’m happy, and I’m narrowly fighting off the urge to hate myself, condemn myself even, for that happiness.”

“Good boy,” Hannibal smiled, leaning down slightly to press a light kiss to his lips. “Enjoy yourself. That’s all I wanted from tonight. I want to spoil you endlessly with *everything* you like best, and if I ever push that past what you feel you deserve, then I will think I have done my job correctly.”

“That’s not all you wanted from tonight,” Will retorted, even though Hannibal’s words sent his heart throbbing. He climbed onto the bike behind Hannibal and held on to his stomach. His thighs were pressed to the outside of Hannibal’s, his groin against Hannibal’s ass, and it was very distracting, but he was making a point at the moment. “The leather, the bike, the dirty dancing with strangers in front of me…”

“I keep several vehicles in my garage, as it happens. As for the attire, one must dress to suit the scene. The hunt requires careful planning, and for this one I could hardly wear my usual protective garb. I took risks for you this evening, and I think it paid off. I also think the leather and the means of transport meet your approval.”

“Oh? What makes you think that?”

“Those jeans you’re wearing are delightfully well-fitted, Will. They leave very little to the imagination.”

“That’s because they’re the ones *you* gave me,” he sighed as if aggravated, but he was blushing. Six months ago, the jeans had been even tighter, and he still remembered how they’d laughed together when Will tried them on for the first time.

“Okay,” Will admitted, holding Hannibal snugly as the engine came alive with a powerful rumble. “Maybe I think it’s a good look on you.” His eyes wandered to the black gloves on Hannibal’s hands and he shivered, thinking of them all over his naked body. Wanting that so much he could taste the sex on his tongue, earthy skin and bone, sweat, leather and blood. “*Maybe*.”

Hannibal drove them twenty minutes away to a park where he left the motorcycle under a large oak tree.

“I’m pretty sure they’re closed,” Will noted, flicking the lock on the fence with one finger, shivering slightly in the crisp night air.

Hannibal stowed their helmets in the storage compartment under the seat of his bike, then unzipped his leather jacket, placing it around Will’s shoulders.

“Imagine the scandal,” Hannibal winked, peeling off his bloodsoaked t-shirt as Will gaped at him.

In the moonglow and dim lighting from the park lamps, Hannibal’s luscious body was golden, save for the silvery dusting of chest hair now encrusted with blood. As he turned to retrieve something from the storage compartment, Will watched the muscles flexing in his back, the fit of those tight pants to his ass.

“Wh-what are you doing?” he fumbled to say, slipping his arms through the jacket and melting into the smell of Hannibal and the buttery embrace of leather. It was heavy on him and too big, and perfect.

Hannibal pulled on a long-sleeved black sweater and ran a hand through his glamorously unruly hair, smiling that subtle, infinitely knowing smile again. “Wouldn’t want you to be cold, Will. Come with me?”

“You know I will,” he accused, following as Hannibal climbed over the fence to a large, grassy field. In the distance, a tall pagoda loomed, grand and a little creepy, just right for Hannibal’s aesthetic.

“You knew exactly how I would react to tonight’s little *show*,” Will accused, lingering as Hannibal held him by the waist after catching him when he jumped down from the fence.

“That’s where you’re wrong, Will. I can never fully predict you, and I’ve given up even aspiring to do so. I only wanted to offer you an invitation that was sorely overdue.”

Will nodded thoughtfully, looking at the building across the field. “How’s the view from up there?”

Hannibal glanced at the pagoda and grinned. “It’s splendid.”

From the top floor of the tiered temple, they could see downtown Baltimore and the surrounding neighborhoods, Fort McHenry, the Patapsco River, and Key Bridge. The city was laid out before them like a gem-littered, velvety-dark carpet, a world that was theirs for the taking.

“I want to be clear about something,” Will decided after they stood there for a few minutes, their arms around each other and Will’s face nestled into Hannibal’s chest. He had to curve himself down slightly to press against him the way he liked, and the inevitable stiff neck was completely worth it. “I’m not ready to be with you again.”

“I see,” Hannibal murmured, his eyes blazing dark and mysterious out at the beautiful view before them, avoiding Will’s sensitive gaze.

“Hey,” Will said softly, drawing back with a serious look, “I’m not ready to be with you *yet*. I want to be clear about why.”

“Very well.” Hannibal massaged the back of Will’s neck to ease the tension of a posture he knew had to be as uncomfortable as it was addictive. “Tell me why.”

“I can feel your heart sinking, but don’t let it. You see, it would be too easy and I’m worried it won’t be for the right reasons. I want you in control again. To just let you have me. Be my lover, my therapist, be my everything, run my life. I’m tired and I miss you so much it’s stealing all the air. I want to tell you to take me *hunting*, feed me whatever you think I should eat and I’d love it, tell me what we should do and I’ll be there. I love you, but the way we are together is wrong.”

“Does it feel wrong?” Hannibal wound his free hand through Will’s hair, playing with the glossy, overgrown curls, caressing his scalp, and overall making him feel like a well-loved and soothed kitten.

“Why are you so sure that has anything to do with it? Let’s not argue over binary concepts of right and wrong, let’s just say for now that...even without my innocence intact, I feel obligated to try and follow moral conventions. If I give into this, I’ll disappear into it forever. And maybe...I need a little time to adjust to the idea that I’m in love with a man for whom *murder* is the perfect date night.”

“Will, the dinner-and-a-movie dates were perfect for me, too. I meant every word I said to you on our first date, even if I didn’t realize it at the time. My ploy to get close to you was selfish for reasons I never intended...I wanted to be near you so badly, but I couldn’t admit the weakness to myself. Now I see our bond as a strength. I’m clear about that. Do you understand?”

“I was so vulnerable with you,” Will trembled, and Hannibal’s hold on him seemed to be the only thing keeping him together. Tears welled in his eyes and his throat ached. “Back then, I -- let you see how anxious and lonely I was, how much I wanted to find someone I could be happy with, and...to think you used that against me, I can’t really tell you how much that hurt.”

“Will, I love you,” Hannibal sighed, his voice thick with emotion, and he kissed Will’s tear-stained mouth with excruciating gentleness. “Aš tave myliu, my only one.”

“I want to believe you,” Will said against Hannibal’s collarbone as they hugged needily, their bodies fitting together again with warmth and light. “I want to believe you so badly, that this isn’t another game.”

“I’ve never been in love before,” Hannibal admitted, cupping Will’s face in both hands and holding him in place with his tender, frightened eyes. They were animal eyes, gold and bright. “I was afraid. Do you understand?”

Will slipped a hand under Hannibal’s sweater and felt for his hammering heartbeat. “It feels real.”

“It’s real,” Hannibal insisted, quivering at Will’s touch, his lovely fingers traveling across tender skin and firm muscle, ruffling his chest hair. “Let me show you, please just --”

Will stared up at him, transfixed.

“Let me taste you?” Hannibal begged, kissing down the side of Will’s face and into his neck. Will pulled his hand out from under Hannibal’s shirt and put his arms around his neck, sneaking into that gorgeous silvery mane and tugging.

“God,” Will sighed, his own heart thundering so loudly he could barely process thought, only feeling, only Hannibal. “Okay, yes…”

Within an instant, Hannibal was on his knees, kissing obsessively over Will’s low belly as he undid his jeans and tugged them down to his ankles. Will’s back hit the nearest wall as he continued tangling his hands in Hannibal’s hair, so soft and smooth, as he absorbed the reality of Hannibal touching his bare skin with leather gloved fingers, clasping his hips tightly, biting his thigh…

“Yes,” Will nearly sobbed, the months of deprivation building into a crushing tide, splashing roughly against the floodgates he had built to keep out this longing. The gate shook under the weighty heft of that wave, that need, and Hannibal let out a weakly decadent cry as he finally got his lips around Will’s throbbing erection.

This was the last thing Will should let him do...he was a *cannibal*, for fuck’s sake, and Will was letting him put the most sensitive part of his body in his *mouth*, and he trusted Hannibal in ways he had told himself he never would again, and it felt so good. Not right, it wasn’t that -- not yet, anyway. He would know when it was right. Now, it was what they both needed.

Hannibal moaned again and cupped Will’s balls, leaning in to take him down to the base, and Will mewled, shockwaves of pleasure already darting though his whole body. Then Hannibal set about sucking, licking and slurping at Will with greedy delight, saliva dripping shamelessly from his swollen lips as he gazed up, their eyes locking. Hannibal was sublimely servile again, committed to Will’s pleasure, living for the taste and feel of the weighty cock in his mouth, salty with precum, living for Will’s breathy little cries. Will’s orgasm surprised him with its suddenness, his back arching as he gripped at Hannibal’s hair, spasming against his mouth as his semen pulsed hot and Hannibal savored it, stroking Will’s hips and ass.

“C’mere,” Will panted with another tug at his hair, which he had never manhandled with such force. “Here.” He drew Hannibal up into a demanding, graceless kiss, and Hannibal lapped at his mouth with equal fervor. He had saved a taste of Will’s cum, transferring it to his tongue as the taste and the dirty intensity of the gesture made Will groan, fingers digging tight into Hannibal’s shoulders, Hannibal’s smoothly gloved hands up under the back of Will’s shirt.

“Those fucking gloves,” Will accused breathlessly, and Hannibal put two fingers in his mouth.

As Will sucked at him, Hannibal growled and slapped his ass, gripping it ruthlessly. He took his lubricated fingers and trailed them between Will’s cheeks, teasing his hole, breathing hard against Will’s forehead. “When you’re ready,” he said, and it was a promise. “Everything, Will. All of me, however you want it to be. It’s yours.”

He placed his hands on Will's hips again and they kissed slowly through the afterglow, no further explanation needed. Then Hannibal pulled Will's underwear and jeans back up with gentle care, fastening the button with an indulgent smile. He replaced the jacket around Will's shoulders, which had fallen off somewhere in the wildness of their encounter, and murmured, "Can I take you home?"

"Yeah," Will sighed, overwhelmed and energized and exhausted at the same time. As ever, it was all too much to hold in a human body. "You can do that. Thank you for tonight, I think...in ways I don't understand yet."

"Anytime, Will. Always."

Chapter End Notes

So I think we have about three chapters left <3 I have some ideas for continuing this as a series afterwards as well! Hope you enjoyed the updates and thanks for reading!

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

cw: child abuse

Babe, babe, babe, I don't think you know what you're doing
I fade, fade, fade into your mind
I am doomed, man
Your eyes, eyes, eyes, dark as the sky that I'm breathing
Walking back through the same door that I came in
You could give me all the reasons not to give in please
And I already know, so what can I do?
Wonderland is far away but there's love as they say
Anyone could change if they wanted to
But I'm sick of trying to be good
-MO, "Trying to be Good"

Hannibal didn't contact Will after that, which meant he was giving Will space again. Will planned to make the most of the break in their communication, hard as it was to take -- this was a chance to breathe and figure out what he wanted, finally, definitively.

It didn't seem like much of a question, aside from the anxiety of once again opening himself up for a world of hurt. He had to be able to trust Hannibal, and he wasn't there yet. Still, he couldn't seem to sleep without replaying the memory of Hannibal's tender, lethal eyes as he drew the blade across Astrid's throat, a ritual blood sacrifice, a peace offering, a symbol of eternal love. A plea for acceptance and joining.

Hannibal's big hands, so deftly confident in what he did, the grip of them, the delicious power, and afterwards...the hot, slick rapture of his mouth, taking Will in deep and swallowing him down, smearing Will's cum back onto his own tongue...Will masturbated with wild abandon, soaking the bed in sweat, the world flashing glitter gold and blood red, the wendigo looming over him in the shadows, fucking him relentlessly.

Will was changing, evolving. He couldn't think of his role of murderer by proxy with the slightest twinge of guilt as the days drifted on; the event had lent him a new clarity. He felt at home in his own skin, and was able to actually enjoy work. Even Jack had remarked, impressed, that lately Will was clear-headed, quick on his feet, decisive in his judgements. Will closed the latest case in two days. He felt...like himself, for the first time.

One hot April afternoon, he brought his car in for an oil change, but when he arrived at the usual little mom and pop auto shop, the only one in Wolf Trap, he found it had recently closed. He had to drive into the next town, forty minutes past huge fields and occasional farms, until he found another shop. The small garage and adjoining office were a shining, cheerful red and it seemed like a welcoming place.

“Hey,” smiled a teenage girl with freckles, wearing a blue kerchief over blonde braids. She was out front alone, touching up the fresh-looking paint job on the building. “We’re open for business! What can I do you for?”

Will could tell she prided herself on being a part of this place, like a little businesswoman, so he grinned and asked, “An oil change and a car wash, please? Are you the mechanic?”

She laughed, blushing with pride at his assumption. “No, that’s my dad. I’m Rebecca. We just moved here, ‘cause my mom died a few months back and dad wanted a fresh start. This place came up for sale, seemed perfect."

Her face fell as she elaborated, "Our old shop went in a fire...Mom got trapped inside.” Rebecca chewed her bottom lip, and Will got the impression she didn’t have anyone to talk to most of the time.

“I’m so sorry to hear about your mom. I’m Will, by the way. So, how are you all settling in -- do you like your school?”

“Naw, I’m home-schooled. I hope my dad starts letting me go out more, though, I’m *so bored*! He won’t even let me hang out with the youth group from *church*--”

“Becky,” said a gruff male voice as a burly, balding man rounded the corner, dressed in a mechanic’s jumpsuit, “What did I tell you? If we have a customer, you call me right away, you don’t stand around talkin’ their ear off with your nonsense!”

Rebecca winced, staring down at the ground and winding one braid tightly around her finger.

“Actually, your daughter is a wonderful asset here,” Will said, his brow knitting. He looked the guy up and down, instantly getting a bad vibe about this entire situation. “She’s obviously a hard worker,” he noted, musing, *maybe a harder worker than she should have to be at her age*. “...With a good head on her shoulders and a remarkably cheerful outlook, considering all she’s been through. You should be proud.”

“Proud!” the father cackled, “Listen, son, you wait ‘til you have kids of your own and they disrespect your orders, slack off when they oughta be working, embarrass you in front of strangers, see how you like it.” He spat out a wad of chewing tobacco on the ground and Will grimaced as Rebecca’s face went crimson with actually justified embarrassment.

Will didn’t trust this guy with his car, but he also wasn’t going to leave now without making sure Rebecca was safe here. He knew what an abusive environment looked like, the casual degrading comments that could so easily escalate.

“I think she’s doing great,” Will repeated with a plastic smile. “Listen, uh -- Hank,” he nodded to the guy’s name-tag, “I’m looking to get an oil change?”

“‘Course, gimme your keys? Thank you, sir, meant no disrespect, just parenting woes, you know?”

“Uh-huh,” Will answered, following Hank’s gaze to another car that pulled into the lot.

As the man went to greet the new customer, Rebecca invited Will inside to the neat little office area. “You can have a coffee while we’re working on the car,” she smiled.

“Rebecca,” Will asked as she handed him the paper cup of black coffee with shaking fingers, “I work for the FBI -- now, that’s not why I’m here,” he laughed gently as she looked alarmed. “I’m really here for an oil change, but I noticed the way your dad treats you. Thought I should ask you about it, make sure everything’s alright.”

Her kind hazel eyes were big and frightened. “He just wants me to be better, to hold up my end around here, and at home. But yeah, it’s...it’s been hard.”

“He doesn’t ever hit you, does he? It’s okay to tell me if he does, but there’s no pressure either. I just want to help, if you need it.”

She rolled up her shirt sleeves and showed him rows of bruises, tears slipping down her cheeks. “Can you help me? I think...I think he killed...m-my mom, think he set the fire. I try to put a smile on all the time, so he doesn’t go after me any worse than usual. But I’m scared.”

Will clasped her hand warmly and nodded, rage flooding him, along with memories of his own childhood, replete with emotional abuse and neglect from his father and all too frequent beat-downs from bullies at school. He thought of cases he’d worked back in New Orleans as a homicide cop, where situations like Rebecca’s went on long enough that he was finding an abused teen's dead body instead of a survivor asking for his help.

“I can help you,” he said softly, just as Hank came storming back in, glaring at Rebecca.

“Becky, I need a word with you outside, *now.* It’s about that sorry excuse for a paint job. Sir, if you can wait here, I’ll have your car ready shortly.”

“Actually, Hank, I wondered if I could have a word with you alone, just for a couple of minutes. I had some questions about a noise my car’s been making lately.”

“Oh, sure,” he shrugged, “Becky, go get started on the oil change. See if you can manage not to screw that up, too.”

She was off like a shot, and Will set the cup of coffee down on a nearby counter, eschewing the row of small blue chairs and instead crossing his arms, staring Hank down.

“It’s pretty obvious to me that you’re not treating your daughter the way you should,” Will accused, voice steely.

“What the fuck business is it of yours?” Hank laughed sardonically.

“I’m FBI, that’s what business it is of mine.” Will took a step closer as his jaw twitched, blue fire blazing in his eyes. “I’m going to alert child services of the observations I made here today. But first I’m warning you personally, that if you lay another finger on that girl, if you say one more horrible, hurtful thing to her when she just lost her mom and you’re supposed to be taking *care* of her -- I will stomp you into the fucking ground.”

“No you won’t, you nosy, disrespectful pussy,” Hank glowered, “How dare you come in here and talk to me about my family? You don’t know shit about us, or my relationship with my daughter. She’s my kid, and I’ll raise her as I see fit, ain’t nobody else’s business unless they want their teeth knocked out. Why don’t you get, before I call the cops on you for threatenin’ me? I know my rights, douchebag.”

“I’m sure you do,” Will said icily, casting a wicked smile on the man.

He couldn’t deal with this here and now, but he knew child services wouldn’t be able to protect Rebecca fast enough. Hank could turn on her at any moment; all it was going to take was one drink too many one night, one supposedly wrong word or move on her part. Furthermore, traditional justice simply wouldn’t be enough to punish Hank for his crimes. It wouldn’t be *fair.* Will had a much better idea.

He pretended to leave, but staked the place out all day, then followed Hank and Rebecca home to a ramshackle house just as isolated as Will’s own. That was the thing about this part of Virginia; you were so far away from your nearest neighbor that it was an ideal place to hide.

Will took care of a few important errands, then returned.

One look at the house with its old roof that looked about to cave, the overgrown lawn and broken swingset likely left behind by the previous residents, told him that the prideful alterations to the car shop, from the apple red paint and the neat-as-a-pin facilities, even the cute waiting room with its fanned out magazines and complimentary cookies, was all Rebecca. She’d thrown her heart and soul into the shop as an outlet, an escape from whatever horrors characterized her home life. Will sat in his car until it got good and dark, then he crept to the house, peering in the windows to ascertain that Hank was alone, watching tv in the living room, surrounded by empty cans of beer and an overflowing ashtray. Rebecca must be asleep in her room.

It was easy to pick the lock, even easier to sneak up on Hank and clap the chloroform rag over his mouth, then drag him out to the woods. The rush of adrenaline through Will’s veins was glorious. Hank woke to find himself lying on the rough ground, slumped against a tree with Will looming over him, wearing work gloves and a new pair of hiking boots he’d picked up during his errands.

“The fuck you do to me, freak?” Hank mumbled, sitting up, clearly still dizzy. “Some kinda drug?”

“It’s a funny thing about chloroform,” Will said conversationally, “People don’t always know this, but it’s easy to make, if you’ve got chlorine bleach and a few other basic household substances. Looks like I got it right.”

“You’re out of your damn mind.” Hank tried to stand, but Will chuckled as he immediately stumbled back against the tree.

“Now, Hank, I guess you have to ask yourself a question. Did I bring you here as a demonstration? Am I just trying to teach you a little lesson about how it feels to have control of your safety take away, how it feels to be in danger with nowhere to turn? Or what it’s like when the one person in the world you depend on for love and support treats you like garbage.” He shrugged, “Maybe I’ll take you back home now, if you’ve learned your lesson.”

“Fine, you made your fucking point, now let me go!”

“Or,” Will said, congenial and smooth, “Did I bring you here for a much more thorough demonstration?”

“No, don’t. Don’t hurt me, you’ll get caught, you’ll spend the rest of your life in jail--”

“Some say law enforcement make the best criminals, because we know how to cover our tracks. We’ve seen all the dumbass mistakes other criminals make, and we know *just* how to work the system. You know how to work the system, don’t you, Hank? Why did you really leave your old town -- child services coming around too often, starting to put the heat on you? It’s just a cycle, and a bunch of paperwork, really, isn’t it, until you hurt her so bad one day they finally have the evidence they need to *do* something. Right? So you just don’t hurt her that bad, you leave the bruises where they’re easy to hide, and if they happen to show, make up excuses about bumping into walls and falling down stairs. I bet the locals had their suspicions about what really happened to your wife, too. Not too smart to stay and find a new business there; much better to run away from your bad reputation.”

“Listen, man, what do you want? You want money?”

Will laughed, grabbing Hank by the scruff of his shirt and flinging him flat down on the ground, planting a foot to his chest. “No, Hank, I don’t want money,” he tsked, “I want to know if you remember what I said I’d do to you.”

“No!” Hank cried out, lifting his hands to shield himself, but he was still out of it from the alcohol and chloroform, and Will’s boot was iron-tight to his ribs.

“You don’t deserve to have a daughter,” Will informed him coldly, eyes flashing in the darkness. “I have a daughter, and I *know.*”

The first stomp crushed Hank’s windpipe, providing Will the satisfaction of silencing his vile, disgusting mouth. Next came his ribs in a gratifying crunch, and then it was just a blur of hard smacks of Will’s boots into his body, breaking his arms and legs, kicking his face in, bashing out his brains, splattering the ground with blood, skin and organs, decorating the forest floor with the beauty of this justice. He stood there panting over the body afterwards, covered in bloody viscera, proud and righteous.

To one side of him he saw the wendigo, waiting for him, black eyes shimmering with pride. On the other, he saw Garret Jacob Hobbs, who smiled at him. “See?”

Will nodded respectfully, even gratefully, tracing the shape of antlers cascading up from his own head. His skull ached from the new growth, but it was a lovely pain. He was part of nature, one with the woods, roaming like any feral beast should roam, enacting vengeance on behalf of the universe, defying God’s decree that life should be riddled with unnecessary evil. He could stop evil, anytime he wanted now, cure the world of it like the disease it was. It was his right.

The wendigo drew near and traced Will’s mouth with its long, curved nail, then licked the blood with a euphoric sigh that vibrated through Will’s own body. He caressed the wendigo’s cheek, then his arm, admiring the cruel, pitch black majesty of him, muscle hard and smooth as marble, tensed in excitement. Then Will leaned up to kiss him, sloppy and deep, savoring the blood and the greedy wet swirl of the long tongue against his own. His heart soared.

But he must not linger, despite the temptation to revel in what he had done.

Will peeled off his clothes, stuffing them along with his boots into a garbage bag he’d brought. He walked naked under cover of the night, only a sliver of a moon, and threw on new clothes at the car.

Rebecca never said anything about the FBI agent who had coincidentally visited the shop on the same day her father was found dead in the woods. The case was ruled a homicide, but there was no evidence to link it back to Will, and Hank might have his share of enemies. Or it might go unsolved, but justice had been served. Rebecca went to live with her Aunt in Richmond. Will kept tabs, and she seemed to be well cared for, healthy and happy.

Of course, someone else had made note of the mysterious recent murder.

Chapter 20

Will craned his head back and took in the vibrant warmth of the sunlight on his face as he stood in the quiet of the stream, fishing pole in hand. He heard soft footfalls approaching the riverbank behind him and smiled at the distinct scent of spicy cologne on the air.

“You wanna join me?” he asked, turning to regard Hannibal with a welcoming smile.

Hannibal smiled back, transfixed. Will's eyes sparkled, flashing jade in the sunshine. His body was irresistibly perfect as always, even in flannel and waders. The faded green flannel was left open, revealing a white t-shirt sliding against a slender torso in a way that made Hannibal’s mouth water. It appeared Will had a haircut recently, but left the curls on top to twirl in every direction as usual.

“This may be the part wherein I admit that I’ve never been fishing before.”

It took great mental exertion to peel his thoughts back from admiring Will’s physique. Then Hannibal tried to hide his slight disdain at the thought of the cold, hardly sanitary water, not to mention exhibiting his complete lack of skill at this endeavor.

“There’s a spare set of waders in my bag there, and you can use Abigail’s pole,” Will grinned, turning back to the water, preparing to cast off again. Several large trout were already laying on a bed of ice in a nearby cooler. “Get over here, Dr. Lecter, I’ll show you how it’s done.”

Hannibal rolled up the sleeves of his pristine white shirt, then did his best to pull the waders over his tan trousers without falling over. He knew how to bait a hook, had done research on the topic soon after visiting Will’s house for the first time...thorough research. The memory of piercing his thumb on Will’s hook and sucking the blood, imagining his lips and tongue were Will’s...well, it brought a smile to Hannibal’s soul. Perhaps it was best to push aside the accompanying memory of his *other* thought process in that moment, which had been to use homemade flies to frame Will for murder. Thus was the cost of always following multiple trains of thought at once, but he had since divested himself of every fear regarding Will, except the never-ceasing dread of losing him.

After preparing his own fishing pole, he glided through the water with as much dignity as he could manage, then stood beside Will with a wry look.

“I came to talk about --”

“I know what you came to talk about,” Will admitted, nudging his shoulder fondly. “Lift off, and cast. Trust me, you’re gonna love this.”

“I’d love doing anything if it’s with you. Were you hoping I would know it was you who killed Hank Jennings?” Hannibal cast his line, wincing slightly at the way it landed with a heavy splash.

He tried to act naturally, but his rigid posture made Will laugh.

“Relax,” Will soothed, massaging his shoulder. His gaze flicked appreciatively over Hannibal’s bared forearms. “You’re doing good. And I wasn’t hoping you’d know I killed Hank; I was certain that you would.”

“His daughter’s testimony confirmed that the man’s actions were sufficient to invoke your wrathful judgement. The manner in which it was carried out...was quite in line with the way I imagined you would most like to kill. Brutally, and with minimal use of any weapon except for your own body, your force, your ingenuity.”

“I guess I was hoping you’d be proud of me.” Will glanced over at Hannibal with new trepidation. “But you look dismayed, Doctor.”

“You’ve been reckless. I also read about the case last week, in Emmitsburg. They found the mayor’s limbs in two separate fields, miles apart. Her head and torso had been ruthlessly halved as well, most likely with an ax.”

“She couldn’t make up her mind about supporting laws to help the poor in her community,” Will smiled serenely. “Her replacement as mayor has been very vocal about providing shelter and rehabilitation for the homeless. I think things around there are really gonna turn around now.”

“She died as she lived, divided, selfishly indecisive, catering to whichever wealthy patrons were likeliest to fund her reelection campaign.” Hannibal fidgeted with the pole. He did not want Will to misinterpret his concern as disapproval.

“Too much?”

“‘Proud’ is an insufficient word to describe my admiration and delight in what you have created. But if you go on like this, you’re far too likely to be caught.”

“Maybe I let myself be a little extra reckless on purpose, to get your attention.”

“Maybe you love what you do so much that you cannot control yourself in the thick of the hunt,” Hannibal posited. “I anticipated it might be like that, not only because of your natural inclination to ferocity, but also because you have held down your instincts for so long.”

Will averted his eyes and gulped. Hannibal knew he’d hit the point with exacting truth.

“Are you saying I’d be safer hunting with a partner?”

“It would have to be someone you trusted implicitly. I fear I’ve lost the privilege, but if you could find it in you to try and put your faith in me again, I would regard it as the foremost honor of my life. I would treat it, Will, as a sacred duty. You are sacred to me.”

A few minutes passed in silence between them, and Will caught another fish.

“I can’t quite tell what I may be doing incorrectly,” Hannibal admitted.

“You need to hold it…” Will walked behind Hannibal, legs sloshing through the water. Framing his body with his arms, Will moved Hannibal’s hands into a more sensible

placement on the pole, lingering with his breath warm by Hannibal's ear. "Like this."

Will baited his hook again and returned to Hannibal's side, shooting him a quizzical look. "So do you know the most common opening line in a dating app profile?"

"From my own experience, I'm guessing…'Looking for someone to share my next adventure,'" Hannibal smirked.

"Yup. You know, I used to think that was such a cheesy, meaningless line, but now I'm not so sure. It rings surprisingly true at the moment."

Hannibal opened his mouth to reply, but he felt a sudden tug on his line and his face lit up with prideful glee. "I think I've caught one!"

"Okay, reel it in, just turn the knob...like this," Will took advantage of the opportunity to again shadow Hannibal, touching him much more than was necessary, and Hannibal took advantage of the chance to lean back against his warm, slim but firm body for completely unneeded support.

"Beginner's luck!" Abigail chirped, appearing at the river's edge with the dogs trailing behind, yelping in surprised happiness at seeing Hannibal again. "Back up, you guys," she chortled, "Hannibal doesn't *always* have treats in his pockets for you."

"You sound exactly like Will when you speak to them," Hannibal nodded, pleased to see the evidence of the familial bond between them.

Nonchalant, like she often found them fishing together, Abigail sat in the lawn chair perched under the nearest tree and took out a book, *Knitting for Beginners*. This was her relaxation reading. Much of her time was otherwise spent poring over college textbooks for her online courses, psychology with a minor in criminal justice. "Don't let me interrupt anything," she beamed.

Hannibal was happy she was here, as it seemed to complete the quiet, tentative joy of the scene. But he couldn't stop contemplating the meaning of Will's words, wondering if this day could be the next step in them coming back together. Wondering what Will might have said next if they hadn't been interrupted. Perhaps it was better to forestall the conversation, even by mere hours, if only to allow himself this additional bit of time to fantasize and hope.

"You've a lovely array of wildflowers hereabouts," Hannibal murmured close by Will as Abigail disappeared into her book and the dogs chased each other, and every available bird or butterfly. "Do you know what these charming pink and white ones are called?"

"Thought they were all different varieties of phlox," Will admitted, clearing his throat as Hannibal's attentively sensuous tone made him blush.

"Indeed, for the most part. There's wild blue phlox, creeping phlox, and just there," Hannibal nodded to the deep magenta and ivory tinted flowers with their fringed petals spread like elegant fans. "That is Sweet William."

Will snorted. “No, it’s not.”

“Pink...and white,” Hannibal smiled, curving his fingers and trailing them down Will’s increasingly warm cheek. “A flower thought so divine by the Greeks that the genus name is translated to ‘flowers of God.’ I think it’s almost terribly appropriate.”

“I’m trying to concentrate,” Will sighed, trembling slightly, his pole wobbling in his fingers as Hannibal’s breath tickled his face. “Aren’t you staying for dinner, don’t you want me to catch us something good?”

“I know I may rely on you always to catch us something good, something delicious. You’re a greedy boy when you let yourself be free. By all means, proceed.” Hannibal made his way back to the riverbanks, and Will could basically taste how pleased he was with himself, or was that Will’s own pleasure, his own pride at the praise?

“They are edible,” Hannibal observed, leaning down to pluck a few Sweet Williams by their strong, long stalks. “And will make an ideal garnish for dessert.”

“I’m pleased to see you eating better,” Hannibal smirked as Will stole a bite of the vegetable medley which Hannibal had prepared very simply, as with the fish, in lemon butter with herbs. “But it’s rude to pick off the plate before it’s formally served.”

“I bet you’d let me be rude.” Deliberately sassy, Will stuck his thumb in his mouth and licked the sauce from it slowly, their eyes staying locked. “If I felt like it.”

“It wouldn’t be the first time, nor the last.”

They had each showered before Hannibal began preparing their meal, and Will’s hair was still a bit damp, darker than usual and throwing his startling-blue eyes into sharp relief. He didn’t assume deceit from Will’s gaze anymore. The unpredictably changing shades, seeming to possess hundreds of prismatic variations, suited Will exactly. Hannibal allowed himself to be dazzled, even weak at the sight.

“Besides, it’s not my fault you even manage to make carrots and zucchini into a mouth-watering *event*.” Will drew closer and smiled, “They absolutely melted on my tongue.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere.” It had been so long since Will had flirted with him like this that Hannibal was quite out of his depth, highly aroused and nervous, and Will knew it. After his shyness earlier in the stream, Hannibal was delighted to see him blossoming again under his care. A bashful Will was a delicate treat, but an uncaged Will was the most beautiful profundity his eyes had yet beheld.

Will stroked his face, letting the soft bristly hair on Hannibal’s jaw tickle his fingertips. “You growing a beard?”

“Somebody said they thought I should,” Hannibal winked.

Hannibal wore one of Will's t-shirts, the white fabric stretched tight over his broader chest, and honestly it looked as if the shirt might split down the middle at any moment. Had they been alone in the house, Will would have been sorely tempted to help the shirt along to its demise. As for the way Hannibal filled out Will's grey sweatpants, well, it was best that he kept his eyes above Hannibal's waist, lest the memory of the way he used to love treating that luscious ass became too much to resist without reprisal. Hannibal was still wearing his hair longer these days, but the silver and blonde locks were slicked back and tucked neatly behind his ears. The combination of that suave look with the greying beard against golden skin was quite enough to get Will's heart pumping as his libido throbbed, hungrier for Hannibal than the meal, and that was really saying something. He was ravenous again, and beyond excited to finally be eating something Hannibal had cooked. This all felt like coming home, right down to remembering, finally, what hunger felt like.

"I must have been starving," Will smiled, rubbing his stomach as they stood out on the porch after raspberry and lemon sorbet with pink flowers had rendered him thoroughly full, if not sated.

"You must have been." Hannibal lingered behind Will, hands folded politely behind his back.

Abigail came outside and rushed past them with casually hyper approval. "I'm heading home," she announced, messenger bag slung over one shoulder, auburn hair shining in the moonlight over her blue tank top, denim shorts and white Converse. She looked like she should: a happy, well-adjusted All-American girl, save for the twist in nature and nurture that would always render her loveliness subtly threatening. She looked like their daughter.

"You don't have to leave," Will began unconvincingly.

"Oh, I really think that I do," Abigail laughed. "Besides, I'm going to start teaching myself to knit tonight. You both better watch out, because I'll be amazing at it by the time sweater season comes back around."

"A bracing thought," Hannibal winced as Abigail hopped in her car and drove off.

"You'd wear the ugliest sweater in the world if she made it, but knowing Abigail, she'll probably churn out cable-knit masterpieces. She's already learned to be quite a talented baker under your tutelage, I've tried her caramel sea salt chocolate chip cookies. They were *fancy.*"

"Yes, Will, but you haven't been witness to her harpsichord lessons."

"Such is parenthood," Will smiled, "I'll get us some whiskey."

"You're looking well." Hannibal nodded in thanks as he took the tumbler, then tasted the warm amber liquid, gleaming, spicy and mysterious as his eyes on Will in the cozy evening shadows. "You were gaunt when I saw you at that charity gala, though no less--"

Will chuckled, gripping his glass and flushing pink as his namesake flora again. "Okay, finish the sentence if you must."

“No less devastatingly handsome,” Hannibal conceded, stepping closer, letting the simple facts of their body heat and the chemistry sizzling in the air between them say anything else he felt.

“I like it when you *feed* me.” Will was bold again, drawn out of his protective reticence by Hannibal’s desire, a moth to the flame. His eyes melted over Hannibal in pure blue light that was anything but sweet.

“As I recall.” Hannibal’s smile was cautious. “Yet something is still holding you back.”

“Does it ever frighten you, how well we know each other? Like...reading minds...reading hearts...it shouldn’t be possible.”

“It frightens me more than anything. I didn’t know I could be afraid.”

“I had a plan,” Will admitted, finishing his drink and putting the glass down on the small table beside them. It was out here that he’d first, accidentally on purpose, matched with Hannibal on that infernal, blessed dating app. “When we got back together, I had a whole speech planned. But it wasn’t like this.”

“No?” Intrigued, Hannibal lifted a brow with an adoringly sly half-smile.

“No. I show up at your house out of nowhere one day, knock on the front door and surprise you with this amazing speech. Probably it’s raining and I’m soaking wet, standing there looking at you.”

“Like a love song.”

“Do you want to hear the speech?”

“Let us complete the effect,” Hannibal suggested, going back inside the house and closing the front door behind him.

“You and your role play!” Will rolled his eyes.

“I want the speech, Will.”

Will stepped back and ran a hand through his hair, releasing a shaky breath. He cleared his throat and knocked on the door.

“Will,” Hannibal breathed, looking genuinely astonished, “I wasn’t expecting you.”

It was hard not to laugh, but the seriousness of this moment took over. “Hi, I’m Will Graham,” Will smiled, shaking Hannibal’s hand. “I’m a single, bisexual man seeking a relationship. I teach at the FBI Academy and hunt serial killers...among other things. I love dogs and fishing, and I’m looking for someone to share my next adventure.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes. But I have some conditions. First of all, I don’t play games, so you shouldn’t either.”

Hannibal nodded. “That’s fair.”

“I thought so, too. However, I am *not* drama free, and I wouldn’t want you to be either.”

“Without a little bit of drama, life would be so painfully dull.”

“I’m not looking for hook-ups,” Will added, raising his eyebrows as he shifted closer to where Hannibal waited within the door frame. “I want to find something real. And I have to say...I’m not looking for a pen pal either.”

Hannibal’s gaze was warmly entranced, his smile so soft. “Nor am I.”

“I saw your profile and thought you were, well...gorgeous.” Will enjoyed the pink flush in Hannibal’s cheeks. “We have similar interests, and I think we might be compatible, if a little messy. So I decided maybe it was worth taking a risk just to ask you, would you like to get a drink with me sometime?”

“Nothing would make me happier,” Hannibal beamed.

“Great, but um...Hannibal,” Will ruffled his hair again, a nervous tic Hannibal knew all too well. “We don’t really have to go *all the way* back to the beginning, do we?”

“No, we don’t.” Hannibal leaned in and kissed Will’s lips, feather-light, as if this was a dream. It was magic, transporting Will back to the sidewalk in front of Elixir one night seven months ago when he stopped believing love was just a cruel tease he’d never really get to taste. “Won’t you come in?” Hannibal asked between kisses, clasping Will’s face with delicate care.

“This is my house,” Will laughed into the next kiss, and then it seemed they were almost dancing towards the bed, walking on air.

Chapter 21

Will sat down at the end of the bed and Hannibal climbed behind him, unbuttoning Will's shirt and kissing his neck languorously. He laid his hand over Will's bare chest, feeling his wild heartbeat, testing how fast and hard the organ would slam Will's ribcage if he ran his tongue from Will's ear down to his collarbone and back.

"*Hann*ibal," Will sighed, aching, needing.

Hannibal's own heart was raging out of control, dying to rip Will's clothes off and devour him from head to toe, make him his own again, but he had questions still nipping at the heels of his desire.

"What changed?" he murmured, "Do you trust me now? Do you forgive me?"

"I can't do either of those things." Will ran his fingertip over each of Hannibal's fingers, an old habit. He loved to touch the soft but strong flesh of Hannibal's hands, to feel the pronounced ripples of veins and the delectable roughness of calluses no ordinary psychiatrist would possess. "You're a deceitful, manipulative, cruel person. You can't be trusted or forgiven; that's like giving you carte blanche to do your worst. But what's *changed* is...I have faith in you now."

"Faith," Hannibal posited, moving his hand to stroke in slow circles over Will's belly, "Is believing without evidence. What do you believe in, Will?"

"I believe you love me. And that in your way, you've opened up to me now, you aren't hiding anymore behind fearful bravado. Today, in the river, it finally felt right. You came to me without wanting anything for yourself. You just wanted to know if I was okay. You wanted to make sure I was." He turned his head to catch Hannibal's liquid amber gaze in his ocean blue one; a collision and an embrace. An understanding, crystallized in time. At least that, they could keep forever, Hannibal mused.

"You meet me where I am, and you're fully present in every moment." Will touched the back of Hannibal's head, guiding him gently into a kiss, their lips moving together with gradually increasing force.

"You can trust me if you like," Hannibal invited, his voice gathering thickness as he unbuttoned Will's jeans and eased the zipper down. "I'm putty in your hands. You may do just as you like with me."

"Right now, I want you to do just what you like with *me*. Show me how well we fit together. Remind me."

His breath caught and butterflies fluttered inside when Hannibal reached into his underwear and stroked him, laying rougher kisses on his neck, sucking and biting claiming bruises into skin that had missed this so very much.

"*Oh*…" Will sighed and tipped his head back onto Hannibal's shoulder as he was jerked in slow, loving strokes, and Hannibal bit his shoulder hard enough to make Will shudder. "Baby. Show me again."

"Lie down and lift your hips for me," Hannibal murmured, sliding Will's jeans and underwear off. He stood long enough to deftly undress himself, and Will stared at his body with brazen fascination, especially his thick cock, engorged and near-purple with fierce need. He must be going out of his mind to be touched after all this time, but first he sought to give Will pleasure.

He lay between Will's legs and laid siege to his lips with countless kisses, gliding his cock against Will's until Will grabbed his face and entreated, "I want to make you feel amazing. You should take what you want."

"What I want? What I want, Will, is for you to give into me," Hannibal said simply, his eyes dark, almost menacing, "All the way. No turning back this time." He shifted up the bed, lining his rigid dick up to Will's pretty mouth, and Will nodded, his mouth watering, eyes huge with longing.

Will opened his lips and took Hannibal's cock in deep, groaning in pleasure as his eyelashes fluttered, pupils dilating in overjoyed disbelief. Hannibal rested a hand on either side of Will and fucked his mouth in long strokes, slow at first, then Will trailed his fingers through Hannibal's chest hair with a mischievous tug and tweaked his nipples. With a growl, Hannibal pounded roughly into his mouth, over his satin tongue, straight to the back of Will's throat, luxuriating proudly in the happy gagging noises and cascades of helpless saliva this produced.

Breathless and not anywhere near ready for this to be over, Hannibal withdrew and smiled down at Will's bright red face. He was panting, fingers outstretched for any part of Hannibal he could touch, his voice coming in a thick rasp: "More. More please."

"Your wish is my command," Hannibal approved, his cock throbbing even harder and hotter at the way his good boy looked, curls spilled across the pillow, nipples rock hard, erection flushed and bulging with need, blue eyes misty and passionately sinful.

He pulled Will up to his knees so that they were chest to chest, hearts pressed together with the mere facade of skin and bones to separate their two beings. Not for long, as Hannibal massaged his hands over Will's back and down to his ass, grabbing both cheeks with greedy fervor, then spanking him hard.

They kissed, but it was more like voracious, barbarous licking, biting and sucking, as Will moaned and Hannibal rumbled husky sighs of approval. Hannibal loved the feeling of supple skin turning hot and flushed the more he squeezed, spanked and claimed, loved the way Will's exquisite curves bounced after every loud smack of his powerful hand.

Hannibal sank two fingers smoothly into Will's mouth and stared wantonly as Will slurped and twirled his naughty tongue around them. With deliberate intent, he clasped Will's jaw and made him maintain hard eye contact as he teased his hole with the wet fingers. Will clung to Hannibal's arms and gasped, "God, please, *yes*, Hannibal."

“There’s my lovely, well-trained boy,” Hannibal smiled, pausing only long enough to get the lube from Will’s bedside table. Drizzling it over his fingers, he thrust in deeper, hitting Will’s prostate, causing the other man to give a frantic moan. Undone by Will’s responsiveness, he pressed their foreheads together and murmured, “You could not possibly be more beautiful, Will.”

Shakily, Will kissed him again and went down on his hands and knees, where Hannibal rimmed him with sloppy, obsessive enthusiasm. Will’s elbows trembled and he let out a sweet little moan as Hannibal reached between his legs, stroking his cock and plunging his tongue inside Will’s beckoning, musky heat.

“You’re going to make me come just from that if you don’t let up,” Will gasped. “*Fuck*, Hannibal, you’re so good.”

“Mmm,” Hannibal purred, “Tonight, you may come as many times as you want, my darling. But I won’t make you wait much longer.” He felt the tightness and resistance of Will’s muscles ebbing away until he was soaking wet and ready. “*There* we are.”

Edging forward on his knees, he pushed his cock slowly into the warm, tight embrace of Will’s body, his big hand resting on the small curve of Will’s belly, caressing him there with soothing motions.

“*Ohh,*” Will sighed, reaching back to help guide Hannibal deeper. “I missed you so much.”

“You needed this, my love?”

“Yes,” Will whispered into the crumpled sheets, and again he said it, the phrase which sent lightening down Hannibal’s spine: “More, please.”

Hannibal growled, planting a hand on Will’s low back and pinning him directly into the bed, straightening his own legs to slam into him with merciless abandon. All at once it was too much bliss to contain, especially with Will’s shameless mewls and begging.

“Ride me,” Hannibal ordered, his voice guttural.

He watched worshipfully as Will straddled him and sank down on his dick, his eyes rolling up in his head as they both groaned. Will was a vision like this, an angel of purest ecstasy, sliding up and down Hannibal’s raging erection with his tight, gorgeous body, until Hannibal lost control again and slammed up into him for all he was worth, again and again.

Hannibal had to keep changing positions, or he was going to come, ruining his desperate desire to prolong this beyond what was reasonable. This wasn’t their last night together and Hannibal knew it, but separation had rendered him even more possessive, even more insatiable.

Then he fucked Will the way he often used to first thing in the morning, spooned up behind him and sliding in hard and deep, gripping Will’s hip and covering his face in wet, messy kisses. Will was crying, softly and helplessly, tears sliding down his cheeks. Hannibal’s emotions surged along with his thrusts, fast and wild.

“So perfect,” Will moaned, “Don’t stop.”

That was just it; nothing had ever felt this perfect, not even the two of them; Hannibal never wanted this to end. He wanted to suspend this moment forever in his memory palace, but his body had its own demands, vulnerable and mortal and earthly, and he flipped Will onto his back, tears welling in his cinnamon gaze as he slid back in to the hilt.

“Yes,” Will begged, his hand moving fast now over his own cock, and Hannibal rocked into him, holding his legs aloft by the ankles, feeling the pressure and pleasure rising between them to a powerful, marrow-deep climax, tasting their orgasms already on the back of his tongue.

Will burst all over his fingers and stomach with a hectic moan, hips bucking up. Hannibal pulled out of him and swept some of Will’s warm, sticky, sweet release onto his fingers, slicking up his cock as with a rough grunt, he jerked himself to orgasm all over Will’s hole, then fucked his cum back inside him deeply. Will had a hand on Hannibal’s tensed bicep and another on his soft belly, holding him with so much love, watching his every move, speechless and in thrall.

Several tender minutes slipped away with them tangled together in a post-coital daze, running shaking fingers over each other’s sweaty skin, breathing in body heat, lust and the aching need for more than they could ever give each other.

They were just falling asleep when the dogs started barking and Will grumbled, “In a minute…”

Hannibal laughed, “Do you want me to see to them?”

“Naw, I got it…” Will stood, rubbing his sleepy eyes, and threw on pajama pants, refilling the dogs’ water bowls, then letting them out for a bit.

After a few minutes, Hannibal appeared on the porch behind him, wrapping an arm around Will’s bare torso, resting his face in the crook of Will’s neck.

“I had an inspiration earlier, about the river.”

“Oh?” Will arched a brow, smiling contentedly.

“You love this area of the state. It seems a part of you, in fact. How would you like to find a home nearby, someplace considerably larger and considerably more to *both* of our tastes?”

Will chuckled. “I’m kind of surprised you aren’t suggesting we run away to some exotic locale together, before my reckless bloody sprees land me in prison.”

“Eventually, it is a dream of mine to show you my favorite places in the world, starting perhaps with Paris…” Hannibal played with Will’s curls and kissed his neck. “Then Florence, of course. We’ll bring Abigail. But for now, there is still work to be done here. I shall watch over you, keeping your reckless streak in check.”

“You may try,” Will smirked, turning to wrap his arms around Hannibal’s neck, looking him up and down. He wore only a pair of Will’s plaid boxers, low on his hips, and the effect was entirely profane. Heat pooled automatically in Will’s belly, but he managed to stay on topic. “I’ll like you trying. I might fight back sometimes, but in the end, I do believe you know what’s best for me.”

“You’ll let me take care of you, then?” Hannibal’s face lit up, and Will knew in his heart that despite the fumbles and idiotic mistakes, that was all Hannibal had ever really wanted.

“I think you should always take care of me...starting right…” Will kissed his lips gently, ”Now.”

“Well, then. You’re very dirty, my dear boy. I think a bath is most certainly in order.”

Will kept his eyes on Hannibal’s and whistled, causing the dogs to halt in their playful frolics and return inside.

“I’m hungry again, too,” he pouted.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Petulant boy," Hannibal murmured, slipping a black cherry past Will's lips. The bathtub in Will's house was almost punishingly small, but they made do.

From his position sitting between Hannibal's legs in the hot, bubbly water, Will smiled and licked Hannibal's fingers of excess juice. The slippery glide of his back against Hannibal's chest and stomach felt exquisite, at least as good as nibbling food from his fingers or accepting the many kisses to his neck, the fingers habitually entangled in his curls. "Yes. But you spoil me with such *skill.* How can I resist pushing your buttons?"

"Don't resist." Hannibal tugged Will's earlobe with his teeth, running a wet hand up his thigh under the water, but in the process he nearly upset the plate of fruit resting precariously on the lip of the tub.

They both laughed. "You know, this isn't even bubble bath," Will confided, "It's --" Hannibal pressed a slice of peach into his mouth before he could finish the sentence.

"I know what it is, unfortunately. Rest assured that I will introduce you to a much finer brand of bath soap, rather than this lamentable 'men's body wash.'"

In truth, the piney fragrance wasn't so bad, but Will granted Hannibal his precious snobbery with blissful acceptance. "But you won't change my aftershave," he suggested, biting Hannibal's fingertips.

"You've won me over to it. It smells like you, mylimasis." Mingled with the humor, there was a deeper emotion thickening Hannibal's accent again.

"What's the matter?" Will asked, brow knitted. "Given that we can't actually be having sex every moment of the day and night, this right now feels pretty perfect to me."

"I have a strong resentment to the linear passage of time," Hannibal confessed, holding Will snugly around the waist, burying his nose in wet curls. "At times the feeling almost crushes me. My inability to hold onto this moment…"

"You can hold onto me."

"Not if one of us is ever caught and incarcerated. That I couldn't bear, Will. I know what I would do, that I'd stop at nothing, and that, too, might be the end of us."

"Well, we won't get caught. I'll keep you honest, you keep me safe. Is this why you wrote down all those time-reversal theories in your journal?"

"I might have known you did more that day than sneak off with yet more of my clothing," Hannibal said drily. "Yes, that is why. I want to keep you forever, and mortality mocks the

thought."

"Hannibal, no one will ever come between us again. If they try, I'll kill them without a second thought." Utterly serious, he turned around, then put a hand around Hannibal's throat and held it tight. "You belong to me."

Hannibal watched him, obedient to his every whim but craving, always craving.

"Let me give you as much of my forever as I can," Will said with a haunting smile.

He shifted his hand to rest over Hannibal's heartbeat, raging for him once again.

"That sounded like a proposal," Hannibal observed tremulously.

"It's not formal enough for that; it's more important even than that. It's me saying I will never let you go because I can't."

"Show me," Hannibal asked.

Back in bed, Will climbed astride Hannibal, then fucked him firmly, pinning his wrists to the bed. Pressing their foreheads together as he thrust slickly back into that tight, embracing heat, Will sighed, "God, I missed this, too. Want you so much, baby, all the ways I can have you."

Hannibal watched him with tender, needy, big brown eyes, holding onto Will's back and roving a hand down to feel the powerful curve of muscle in his ass moving up and down, filling Hannibal deeper, making them whole. Will came inside Hannibal with a burning gasp of indefatigable need, biting Hannibal's shoulder as his seed gushed and warmed him from within. Then he climbed down his lover's body and sucked him off to a sharp orgasm, revelling in Hannibal's rough tugs on his hair and his desperate moans.

"Being with you is like staring at the sun," Hannibal mused with his cheek resting against Will's chest. Will held him close, but that was all either of them could do with their aching muscles and numb-feeling limbs, heavy and buzzing with residual pleasure. "You blind me to the need to look out for myself. I've begun to put you first without even realizing it."

"Mmm. I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you when I can breathe, move, or form cogent words again."

"It's not a complaint."

Will smirked. "It's growing on you, codependency? Like horrible aftershave?"

"I take issue with the term 'codependent.'" Hannibal shook his head primly. "Why should it be toxic that I need you more than oxygen? Why should it be wrong that we blot out nearly everything else for each other when we are together?"

"Are you sure you have a degree in psychology?"

Hannibal huffed a laugh. “Do you disagree with my thoughts on the matter?”

“Of course.” He wound his fingers through Hannibal’s hair and drew circles over his back. “We’re completely codependent and it’s outrageously unhealthy. We’re a terrible idea, and my *favorite* idea. The only way forward now is together, in everything, morals and self-preservation be damned.”

Hannibal looked up at him in deepest admiration. “Your own insight into the human psyche must make you an unbearably intimate, shockingly cruel killer. I can hardly wait to see for myself.”

“And you will. I have something in mind...well, someone. Don’t you think it’s time we resolved the whole problem of Abigail’s deal with the devil?”

“Miss Lounds has certainly worn down our mutual patience with her antics. I think it’s a splendid idea, and beneficial to our family, too. Between putting those plans in motion and beginning to scout real estate for our new home, we will be quite busy.”

“Right, but not yet,” Will said, letting his eyes drift shut as his lips curved in a sweet smile. “Let it be a dream for tonight.”

***

Several days later

Freddie Lounds dreamed of fame and fortune, but all she’d really achieved was a huge fanbase of the most shameless true crime junkies, a collection of grudges against her piled sky-high, notoriety and a shitty apartment with a constantly malfunctioning refrigerator.

“Dammit,” she groused, leaning into the fridge and peering at the various items that had gone bad since she left for work that morning. Now it was dinnertime and she was hungry. The lettuce was wilted, but she took out the tomatoes and cucumbers, plus a box of Cheese-Its from the cabinet, then poured herself a glass of warm Chardonnay.

“That *can’t* taste good,” Will mused, his voice emerging abruptly from the shadows of the living room behind her, where she hadn’t bothered flicking the lights on after coming home famished.

She’d merely tossed her keys on the counter and checked out the fridge. As she stood ramrod straight and began to silently panic, lobbing countless accusatory strings of swears at herself, Freddie realized it had been a really, really bad idea to skip her usual paranoid rituals of examining the apartment for any possible intruders whenever she came home. With the number of enemies she had accumulated, break-ins and attacks were hardly unheard of.

Prideful, even if it was to the last, because *fuck* anyone else who thought they could take her ego or sassiness, Freddie turned and glared at Will as he clicked on the lamp. “What do you two want?” she snapped, hands on her tiny waist.

Hannibal sat with his legs elegantly crossed, hands folded atop them. It was a weird visual, given that he was also sporting a plastic suit over his usual, impeccable attire.

“Come now, Ms. Lounds, you’re not generally one for rhetorical questions.”

“I’ll scream,” she said pointedly.

“You won’t,” Will sighed, dragging a finger over the top of the couch cushions, looking bored. “Or we’ll make this much, much more unpleasant for you than it needs to be.”

Hannibal shot him an intrigued glance, well-aware that Will would make this as excruciating as possible, with or without Freddie’s obedience.

“You’re here to kill me, why? Because you want to control Abigail’s life, and I’m in the way? Because I made it my business to protect her from your influence?”

“You shouldn’t have said that, Ms. Lounds,” Hannibal noted sternly.

Will’s hands tightened on his knees over the plastic suit he wore, a match for Hannibal’s. Black fire flashed in his eyes, and his jaw tensed. The animal was coming, and nothing could stop it now. “You really shouldn’t have. You’re a liar. You don’t *care* about Abigail.”

He stood and Freddie flinched back, cataloguing things she could grab in the kitchen to fight back. The butcher knife would do. She inched closer to it. Hannibal’s brows lifted subtly.

“You want to get rich and famous using Abigail’s story, threading your own convenient, disgusting lies through the narrative. And you’re helping yourself to an unreasonably large cut of the profit because you had no qualms about taking advantage of a traumatized young woman mere days after her parents died. Furthermore, Freddie.” Will shot her an incredulous look as she wrapped her fingers around the knife, glossy red nails gleaming. “What do you really think you’re gonna do with that?”

Hannibal tried to remain calm, watching Will wrench the knife from Freddie’s nervous grip like it was no effort at all, a flimsy passing amusement before he could spin her around and yank her into a headlock, sinking the paralytic injection into her arm. Her eyes widened but she couldn’t get a word out due to the very specific and highly effective cocktail of drugs which Hannibal had provided. It had been important to Will that Freddie remained conscious for as long as possible.

He tried to remain calm, but Will’s angelic face, like a glorious Renaissance painting come to life, was so achingly beautiful when cast in utter hatred and cold, lethal intent. Beneath his thin, black cotton shirt, his bicep flexed as he held Freddie in place, and his eyes were filled with an excitement to rival Hannibal’s own.

Hannibal was already hard, and they had barely begun to kill Freddie Lounds.

Will carried her to the bed, which they had covered with plastic, along with the bedroom floor. He laid her flat on her back, then they both looked down at her, considering the

possibilities. Her blue eyes darted wildly between them, trying to decide which of them might show mercy, might reconsider.

“I bet you wish you’d tried a different tact with us, maybe offered to cut us in on the book deal or tell our story, too, with a nice big advance, but don’t worry.” Will petted a hand through her red curls, condescendingly. “There’s nothing you could have said to stop this.”

“Have you guessed our story yet, Ms. Lounds?" Hannibal inquired. "Or perhaps you’ve always suspected. Although you are dreadfully naughty, you do possess a certain base, occasionally clever investigative skill.”

“*We*,” Will smiled, running a finger down Freddie’s forehead and then squeezing her delicate face too tightly, making her eyes flash with pain, “Are the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“That is,” he amended, glancing over at Hannibal, who watched him with awed fascination, “If you don’t mind my saying.”

“I’m profoundly honored,” Hannibal said, and it was the smile of a fiance gazing across a candlelit dinner table when his beloved accepted his proposal. Because he would offer this title to no one outside of himself; they were blurring together so magnificently. It felt destined, too precious even for words to convey his bliss.

“Have you given much thought to the tableau?” Hannibal inquired, his voice throaty with desire despite the rather sensible question. “I ask because it will affect our choice of trophies.”

“I think we should take her heart, since she wasn’t using it anyway,” Will smiled, stroking Freddie’s pale cheek. A bead of sweat trickled down her brow as tears escaped her eyes. “And any other organs you think would be…”

Hannibal leaned across the bed from the other side of it, their postures exactly mirrored, hovering over Freddie’s prone and terrified form, their hands planted calmly to the mattress.

“*Yummy,*” Will finished, and Hannibal trembled with lustful pride in him.

“I don’t think we need to wear these,” Will decided, gesturing to the plastic suits, “As long as we keep the gloves on and clean up after ourselves.”

“As you wish,” Hannibal said. He meant to maintain his focus to keep Will from being reckless enough to expose them, but in this he felt he could safely indulge. They shed their plastic, then Will unbuttoned Freddie’s blouse and pressed the tip of his scalpel to her sternum, drawing a single droplet of bright blood.

“You’ll have to teach me how to do this.” Will batted his eyelashes and looked at Hannibal over his shoulder.

With a surge of riotous lust, Hannibal came up behind him and unbuttoned his shirt, letting it fall to the floor before he did the same with his trousers. He played with Will’s nipples and kissed his neck as he murmured instructions to guide Will on how to make surgical cuts and

remove the heart. Then he stopped touching, lest his darling boy cut himself or damage their planned repast. The thought of the searing, ungodly pain Freddie must be experiencing now increased Will's urgent hard-on as he cut, then dug his greedy fingers in.

Will placed the heart in the medical bag and cooler they had brought, and admired the big, gaping hole in Freddie's chest, even if it was too bad she'd miss out on the rest of the show, the rest of the pain. She stared up at the ceiling, empty of hope.

"We should take the liver and kidneys." Hannibal admired Will's steady hand and soothed him whenever he made a small mistake. "That's quite alright, Will. You're doing amazingly well."

Will nodded, centered despite his mildly shaky anxiety. This part of the hunt was new to him; giving into his instincts and setting himself free from all moral constraint was still a high he was getting used to, and he sometimes felt a ghostly flicker of guilt just around the edges of his mind. It was the conscience of his former person suit, the one he used to think was the real Will Graham. But in this moment, as in all things, Hannibal held him, and Hannibal understood what was best for them. Will felt all of a sudden awash in nearly unbearable gratitude.

"Take your clothes off, too," Will whispered, blue eyes blazing wantonly at Hannibal.

There were so many hungers inside Will, the bloodthirst and the need for Hannibal intertwined and roaring, demanding that Will *take* and keep on taking.

Will placed the remaining organs in the cooler and pushed Hannibal face-down on the bed beside Freddie, climbing up behind him and grabbing his ass roughly.

"I'm going to fuck you now."

"Yes," Hannibal moaned, defenseless against Will when he was like this. "Please."

Will plunged a blood-coated, gloved finger into Hannibal's mouth, and Hannibal sucked obediently. He grabbed the lube from the supply bag on the floor, where it was nestled among Hannibal's surgical tools and first aid kit.

Their knees slipped a bit on the blood-drenched plastic sheet covering the duvet as Will pushed his rigid cock into Hannibal's barely prepped ass, living for Hannibal's elated cries of pleasure and pain.

"You just couldn't wait," he accused darkly, slamming into Hannibal with graceless, brutal thrusts. "Not after *watching* me."

"No," Hannibal gasped, fingers clenched on the plastic, relying only on Will's hard, merciless hold on his hips to keep him upright as joy sang through his body, building and building. "I couldn't wait."

Will spanked him hard and drove into him with selfish, harsh thrusts lacking rhythm, but it didn't matter. Hannibal didn't even have to touch himself to come from this. He exploded

before Will did, hot white light blotting out his vision as the ecstasy shook his bones, rocking him to the core. Will followed quickly with a feral grunt, his arms extended up over his head as he thrust his hips into Hannibal's ass, hot semen splashing deep into Hannibal. He bit Hannibal's ass, a reminder of his claim, then climbed down from the bed on shaky legs.

In the full-length mirror across from the bed, he'd glimpsed something which he had never seen before, and wanted to confirm it was real.

Hannibal lay beside Freddie's still-warm but prone, blood-seeping, hollowed husk of a corpse, catching his breath. "What are you looking at?" he smiled.

"Come and see." Will peered closer to his reflection, naked and black-red with fresh blood almost from head to toe. His eyes stood out like brightest sapphire against the dark palette. He traced the lines of the antlers cascading out of his chaotic curls, loving that luscious throb of pain in his skull from the places where they grew.

Hannibal approached him reverently, then kissed his shoulder. "My beauty."

"My beast," Will said huskily. He turned to lay a smoldering kiss on Hannibal's lips, again sharing the coppery tang of blood and the delectable natural heat they brought out of each other. "I see myself," he added, placing Hannibal's hand on his belly as Hannibal relaxed into the embrace, gazing at Will's reflection over his shoulder.

The wendigo was stunning, claws extended over Will's sensitive skin, long tongue warm and wet against Will's ear.

"I finally see *myself*, the way you see me. I see what we become together. And it's beautiful."

Hannibal nodded, his heart pounding violently. Will closed his eyes and leaned back, falling and falling and falling. Hannibal held him gently, massaging blood into his chest and stomach, kissing his neck. He started to slowly sway, and Will let out a comforted sigh. It would be too much to feel all of this lush, incomparable ecstasy without sharing, without luxuriating.

A short while later, they stood over Freddie again, knowing it was time to put the finishing touches on their work. "So," Will remarked with an arrogant smile, "Let's talk about the tableau."

Chapter End Notes

There will be one more chapter, then an epilogue. <333 Thank you for reading!

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Well, under normal circumstances I'd say we would have a hard time narrowing down the suspect list..." Jimmy Price mused, hovering over Freddie's body in the FBI morgue.

"...but," Zeller finished his sentence, "This is definitely the Chesapeake Ripper. He didn't skip a single one of his calling cards."

"We do have a few small caveats," Beverly put in, "For one thing, the surgery was well done, but it wasn't perfect this time. A few odd knicks here and there."

She winced down at the sight of Freddie in an involuntary reflex of sympathy. None of them had been fans of Freddie's cutthroat journalism, but to see her like this...Freddie looked fragile now. They had found her with all that lustrous red hair tossed out, siren-like, over the pillow, but now the beautiful curls were tucked away for neatness sake. Her torso was just a shell, part of the display, a frame. From her chest to her hips, there was a huge oval cut-out. She'd nearly been hollowed inside, many vital organs taken in an enthusiastic free-for-all. On her pale forehead and down each of her reed-like arms and legs, some of her rudest and most spectacular headlines had been printed out and stapled. It was an insult, an accusation, and a tribute.

"Is it possible the Ripper has taken on a protege?" Jack quirked a brow, rounding on Will with the usual expectation that his top profiler would have the answer.

Will shrugged. "It would be almost impossible for the Ripper to find someone he thought was *worthy* of becoming his protege. But still...the Tattlecrime headlines have been stapled in place roughly, which isn't what the Ripper would do. It's him, and not only him."

"I'm hearing a 'but,'" Jack observed as Beverly, Zeller and Price watched Will in anticipatory intrigue.

"He wouldn't let a mere *student* of his play this active a role in creating the tableau. I think this is more than a protege, Jack...it's a partner."

"Oh, great, he's found a friend," Zeller sighed in frustration.

"Well, everybody needs a friend, even psychopaths," Price posited. "Maybe the Ripper gets lonely, just like anyone else."

"Being alone never bothered him before." Will tucked his hands in his pockets, lingering on the fringes of their analysis with quiet concentration.

"He may have met someone, without whom he felt suddenly alone." Hannibal wasn't there, but his smooth voice poured over Will's consciousness, liquor-sweet, heavy and rich.

"Continuing alone lost its appeal entirely."

Hannibal had left his presence inside Will's mind from the earliest days of his psychic driving, a devil voice teasing and provoking him at the most inappropriate moments. Will didn't regard the voice as an intruder any more, but an invited guest, without whom *he* would be intolerably alone.

"Well, I think this is an ego thing." Beverly looked up from her work with a grim expression. "Everything with the Ripper is about showing off. Now he has someone to control, someone to show off for. Chances are, he'll finally get sloppy."

"He will *thrill* in the act of showing off for someone he -- in his own twisted way -- loves." Jack glanced at Will, rubbing his chin. "If that's true, we've never been closer to catching him."

Will's mouth twitched in a wicked half-smile that came off to the others like his usual sarcastic refusal to embrace optimism. "You mean, to catching 'them,' Jack. I wouldn't be too sure it won't be twice the challenge."

"Enlighten us," Jack prompted, unconvinced.

"The Ripper would only select a partner who was truly gifted, someone who sees life the way he does. And one of the most important qualities we've noted in his murders is that the Ripper is meticulous, clever and quick, far too much so to be caught. If his partner possesses a balancing amount of ruthlessness and cunning…"

"Really, Will." The Hannibal in Will's head sidled up to him and nuzzled mischievously at his neck. *"Now you're just bragging.*"

Mentally, Will shot him a haughty smirk. *I'm just working the case, baby.*

"They could get sloppy, could get caught, but they'll be damn near impossible to bring in without a body count that we don't want to deal with." Jack frowned. "I'm still hopeful. I can't let go of that. If Freddie's corpse proves the Ripper has grown soft enough to take a partner, he's soft enough now to make mistakes. One mistake too many and they're ours."

***

"Honey, I'm home," Will called as he walked into Hannibal's house that evening, balancing a potted floral display on his free hand.

"What's the occasion?" Hannibal smiled, taking the arrangement of cymbidium orchids, dropping a soft kiss to Will's cheek in the process.

Hannibal's skin was warm and flushed from cooking, a white apron tied around his trim waist. His buttercream-colored shirt was open at the collar, sleeves rolled up to the elbows. Will looked him over and simply sighed.

"Jack Crawford thinks the Chesapeake Ripper is going to get *sloppy* now that he has a partner. He thinks we're as good as caught. I guess that had me feeling sentimental. You're

taking risks for me." Will leaned up to kiss Hannibal's mouth, gently. "Not that I think we'll get caught anytime soon. But you've widened the chances of your own capture by letting me into your world. You should know how much that means to me."

"I would be remiss to deceive you that I had any choice in the matter." With a pleased smile at his gift, Hannibal placed the orchids in the exact center of the dinner table, which was neatly set for three, fresh salads laid out, two chilled glasses of Chenin Blanc and a third glass of fresh-squeezed lemonade which would have Abigail grumbling about being mature enough to drink, *"come on, guys!"*

His movements precisely measured, though his pale lashes fluttered more quickly than usual, Hannibal looked back at Will and asked, "Did you think I could have resisted you, mylimasis?"

Will shook his head, "No. But that doesn't mean I'm ungrateful."

Abigail came bustling in, rubbing her stomach with a groan of relief that dinner was ready. "Thank God, I'm starving."

"Abigail, really," Hannibal said, unable to conceal his microsmile of fondness.

"Oh, sorry," she rolled her eyes and dramatically walked backwards to the dining room entrance. Then she strode to her seat with a queenly gait and curtsied. "I presume dinner is served?"

Will snorted as the three of them sat down. "Abby."

"You guys are too precious for words. It's hard not to poke fun. But what I mean is..." Neatly, she pressed her pink silk scarf to the sensitive scar wound on her throat, a nervous gesture she had cultivated to elegance over time. "I get carried away because I'm so excited we're all here, together."

"My friends wanted me to go out to dinner with them after work," Will added, swirling his wine and sniffing it politely, holding the glass by the stem. "Beverly, Zeller, Price. They were going to *Applebees*. Margarita special on Wednesdays."

Hannibal flinched in dismay. Will had lingered meaningfully on the words he knew would irk his boyfriend, summoning images of sugary cocktails made from a mix and baskets of cheap, bland "chicken tenders."

"You were invited too, Hannibal. But I told them no, because I had a family dinner tonight." Will stretched a hand out to each of them and clasped their fingers warmly.

Abigail smiled sweetly, her face alight with glee. "Dads," she said, finally.

"Oh…" Will ducked his face as tears welled up, and Hannibal's own eyes were just as bright.

"We couldn't be prouder to have you as a daughter," Hannibal praised. "Occasional lapses in decorum included."

“We’re your strays,” Will laughed, snuggling his foot against Hannibal’s under the table.

“Perhaps I’m no less yours. Now come, let us eat before the salad spoils.” Hannibal said this mostly to ward off the overwhelming emotion, the unexpected wash of belonging that had taken over his being.

“Tell us about the food,” Will asked, as he often did. The charred lettuce, peas and scallions were joined by perfectly soft-boiled eggs and a dressing of creme fraiche, buttermilk and lemon. As for the crispy salted meat cast artfully over the whole display of healthful culinary splendor, he did not need to guess as to its origin.

“Petits Pois a la Francaise Redux,” Hannibal announced with prime exuberance. “Bacon carmelized in brown sugar and paprika.”

“It’s Freddie, isn’t it.” Abigail said it as a statement, not a question, tucking into her meal with enjoyment, unperturbed. “I mean, it’s perfect. She wouldn’t know whether to be honored or infuriated.”

Will’s eyes darted to her in momentary worry. He had thought to keep her well clear of their murders, but with her own natural instincts, her cleverness, it was only possible up to a point.

“How so?” Hannibal inquired, watching her carefully.

“Well, she’d adore this salad. It’s beautiful, a vegetarian’s dream come true. But then you scattered all this meat on top, which she would *hate*....” Abigail erupted into helpless giggles, “And the meat -- the meat --”

“The meat is *her*,” Will finished, dissolving into laughter as Hannibal chuckled.

“I was hoping it would be a worthy tribute to Ms. Lounds.”

When the three of them had finished laughing, Hannibal cast Abigail a more seriously inquisitive look.

“You are not disturbed that Will and I took care of your Freddie Lounds problem?”

“I was basically expecting you to. And no, I’m not disturbed, it’s just…” She paused between bites, apprehensive. “My bio-dad, he paid tribute to every part of his victims in ways that freaked me out. I’m not going to find any knick-nacks made out of human bones, or pillows filled with hair, am I?”

“No, I don’t feel any need for that sort of thing.” Will felt Hannibal’s nod of acquiescence without needing to look. “Meat is meat.”

“Quite so. The hunt is death, making way for life. Our life, our sustenance. Beyond that, the rest is art, the rest is cherished memories. And you’re to wait, Abigail, until a suitable time to partake.”

“I can wait,” she nodded, “I just wanted to know you could be open and honest with me about what you’re both doing. I’m not even sure I *want* to partake...and I’m not sure I don’t.”

“Take the time that you need to decide,” Will agreed.

Over their second course of liver Venetian-style with polenta quenelles, Abigail asked, “So, how’s the house-hunting going?”

“Well, I keep having to remind your father that we’re looking for a *house*, not an *estate*,” Will grinned, not really mad at all, even though they had bickered quite hotly on the topic during their visits to view homes for sale that week.

“Yes, well, your other father would be perfectly happy in a tiny wooden cabin tucked away from any hint of human society, so long as it had a big enough yard for the dogs.” Hannibal smirked.

“Am I going to have my own room?” Abigail asked, trying to pass the question off as casual. “I don’t really care if it’s a mansion or a shack, if there’s somewhere, you know. For me. I’d like to visit sometimes, stay for the holidays.”

“You’ll have your own room,” Will assured her, his heart overflowing.

***

“You have your heart set on the second place we saw,” Hannibal said to Will when they climbed into bed that night. They settled on their sides, facing each other, and he cupped Will’s face in his hand. “The timber-frame house with the big stone fireplace.”

“You said the kitchen’s too small,” Will bit his lip. “It’s fine, we can keep looking.”

“I don’t want to go on looking.” Hannibal smiled at Will’s bashful expression, in love with the many shades of his personality, innumerable as the colors of his eyes. “I have everything I want within reach. You and Abigail have become my family. You are my partner, and it’s my job to make you happy.”

Will’s heart skipped a beat. “You’re very good at your job.”

“I want you to have the house you desire.”

“Thank you,” Will grinned, already able to imagine it all, the cozy winter nights by the crackling fireplace, reading while Hannibal cooked for them. How much the dogs would love the big yard, how he and Hannibal could go furniture shopping and blend their two styles together, make the place truly their own. There was a perfect bedroom for Abigail, overlooking the field nearby which was resplendent with wildflowers in spring. It had a built-in bookshelf by a windowseat.

“It doesn’t fit into the life you expected to have,” Hannibal observed, softly watching him absorb the idea of them in the new house.

“No, I never expected to live with anyone, not really; I mean, I hoped maybe someday…” He brushed a lock of Hannibal’s hair behind his ear, gazing tenderly into his eyes. “But I never

imagined it like this, I guess I was afraid to."

"And now?" Hannibal kissed him sweetly, across his cheeks and forehead, then finally his lips.

"Now, I'm not afraid of what I want anymore."

Desire surged between them as Hannibal kissed him again, harder, gliding a hand down his warm, naked back.

"Hmmm," Will mumbled against Hannibal's mouth, hot and open to his languid exploration. He licked along the edges of his teeth and sucked his lower lip, pressing his hand up under Hannibal's shirt to quest through his scratchy-soft chest hair and tease a nipple. "You're going to hire someone to knock out a wall and expand the kitchen, aren't you?"

"Any objections?" Hannibal held Will's leg tightly over his own, starting to grind, his erection thick beneath the silky fabric of his pajama pants.

"My only objection," Will purred, his heartbeat naturally picking up speed with Hannibal's every move. "Is that you're not already inside me."

Hannibal turned Will onto his back and smiled into his smooth skin, kissing over his lovely, pale torso, licking his nipples until they were peaked and shiny, nibbling down his stomach with Will's fingers massaging through his hair.

"Are you going to make a habit of coming to bed naked?"

"Abigail went back to her apartment," Will pointed out between soft moans, "And you...you make me want to…"

"Oh, yes?" Hannibal asked, letting Will quickly divest him of his pajamas. Then he resumed his tireless attentions to Will, his beard tickling Will's sensitive skin as he trailed fiery kisses down to his thighs, pausing occasionally to admire the way he had been decorating Will's body at every opportunity.

So many bite marks and bruises, from recent, blue and purple, to more distant and fading, pink and yellow, just begging for him to sink his teeth in and suck them vivid again. There was almost not an inch of Will which he had not taken as his own and placed his mark upon. It wasn't nearly enough, but it was a very good start.

"Oh, yes," Will sighed, hair clinging to his forehead with sweat as Hannibal slid a pillow under his behind, then sucked his cock with messy, lingering fervor, moaning in bliss at Will's taste and the solid heat of his aroused flesh. He slicked his fingers with lube, then pushed them gradually deep inside to open him into aching, blissful submission, every moment a heartbeat closer to to the one when they would be whole again. "Yes, please...don't stop--"

"How could I?" And Hannibal hovered over him, pressing his cock in slowly, feeling that Will was drawing him in, pulling him deeper to where he belonged. "How could I ever stop?"

“Don’t.” Will pleaded, tears streaking his face to join the beads of sweat, and the intensity was more than either of them would have expected. Instead of fading over time, their connection only seemed to grow more frantic, superseding breath and even survival. “*Don’t*.”

“My darling,” Hannibal moaned, pulling out almost all the way and slamming in to the hilt, holding Will’s fearless gaze like the gift it was, something that had been almost impossible to reach. “You’re so fucking good, Will--”

Will shivered and stared at him, entranced and excited beyond measure. Hannibal had never sworn like that with him before, not in English. It felt scandalously course and painfully intimate, something for Will to protect.

“I love you, baby,” Will sighed, kissing his lips, gently biting his cheeks and neck, licking at his beard, lavishing the texture of golden skin and roughened hair on his palate. He wrapped his arms and legs tightly around Hannibal and pressed his lover harder into him with his locked ankles over his ass. “Need you deep, hard. Please…”

“Aš tave myliu,” Hannibal answered, almost smothering him with the fullness of his body weight pressing into him, needing the comfort of total possession. Will bore it with a sigh followed by a happy shiver of pain, and was rewarded by Hannibal drawing back only enough to pound him fiercely into the mattress, reaching under Will to claw at his ass, squeezing and growling, “I love you.”

“I want to be on my hands and knees for you.” Will begged, breathing raggedly, “I need to be.”

Hannibal flipped him roughly and Will flung his hands in front of him, his face distorted in passion. Hannibal watched, transfixed, as his reddened, engorged cock sank back into that sore, pretty pink entrance that throbbed for him, begging for him as much as Will called to him with his clever, wicked, innocent voice. It defied Hannibal’s understanding of how aroused he could possibly be, how far he could be pushed by his feelings for Will.

“My perfect, good boy,” Hannibal praised, spanking the beautiful curves of Will’s ass and rutting into him until he couldn’t withstand the ferocious storm seething through his soul and he was bursting, sticky and hot, spasming almost violently against and into Will.

Will hissed, “God, yes, please give it to me, all of you.”

That was the knife twist to Hannibal’s cruel heart that made him weak for only one person, it was that Will wanted every possible bit of Hannibal he could have, loveliness and horror. It all belonged to Will.

Hannibal reached down and palmed Will's precum-slickened cock, stroking until he came with a sharp jolt and a feverish moan, “Hannibal, Hannibal…”

He knew how Will liked to be held afterwards, how he needed the protection and reassurance while he trembled and perspired, heart pounding with frightening abandon. It was brighter and larger than life, the feeling between them now, and the room seemed ablaze with it,

falling to smoldering pieces around them as Will traced Hannibal's bicep, staring at his body in continued amazement, then meeting his caramel eyes with a short, soft laugh.

"Do you think it will always be like this, or someday will we look at each other and feel just...calm, peaceful, and content? Happy, but...satisfied? Right now, all I can think about is having you again until I can't breathe or move or think, I just want to feel you. Can't be normal, right? Sustainable?"

"If eventually we feel peace together, and are sated by our love, I won't mind," Hannibal said thoughtfully, playing with Will's curls. He pulled them gently, one at a time, wrapping the glossy brown hair around his finger, then watching it spring back into place. "But I can't imagine that time now. I can't see past this. I look at you, and I go mad."

Will snuggled in closer, safe in Hannibal's embrace. Hannibal kissed his shoulder and added, "I feel that our first full hunt together has been my way of anointing you. It's a blood ritual, and it's bound us together for life."

"I thought I was going crazy until I started to kill. Then I felt perfectly sane. I felt closer to you, closer to myself, and I found it was hard to tell the difference, to run fingers over the fault line. We're still joined, but I can't get close enough. And all you had to do was just...show me your truth. Offer me an invitation, show me it was more than temptation, it was a life together, it was finding myself with you. In you, through you." He ran his fingers wondrously over Hannibal's face, across noble cheekbones, tracing full lips reddened by too many kisses and bites. "In us."

"Killing Astrid must have been relatively simple," Hannibal guessed, "Because you only had to give me permission. But in doing so, you granted yourself permission to becoming. I presume that after that, Hank Jennings and Mayor Ridgemont must have been almost shockingly easy."

"I'm still saving lives. Astrid murdered her sister for *money*. Who knows what else she would have been driven to do, to protect her fortune? Hank would have killed his daughter, he had already killed his wife. The Mayor was letting people die on the streets, needlessly. Freddie was destroying lives, ripping them to shreds with her vulgar lies and manufactured scandals. What I do, in its essential composition, hasn't changed all that much."

"*You've* changed," Hannibal surmised.

Will lifted up to look carefully into his face, deciding on the truth as it simultaneously revealed itself. "You changed me. I tried to hate you for the parts of it that started out cruel. I couldn't, because you had already changed me too much."

Hannibal smiled, "I made you love me?"

"I didn't want to do it," Will chortled, teasing amusement dripping into the heartfelt ache of his words. "You were beyond awful, Hannibal."

"For that I am sorry. For that I will spend the rest of my days ceaselessly laboring to make it up to you."

“Why? Because I changed you?”

“I tried to resist you, Will.” Hannibal brushed his knuckles over Will’s cheek, swallowing past the lump in his throat. “But you dismantled my arrogance, my pride, my insistence on walking the world alone, as easily as you smiled or laughed, or cried or kissed me. I never had a chance. I’ve been gone since the first day in Jack’s office, and only my foolish attempts to blind myself on the subject have sabotaged our happiness since then.”

“You still don’t really believe I’ll ever trust you or forgive you.”

“Do you?”

Will shrugged. “I don’t need to do either to love you. And I’ll always love you.”

Hannibal put a finger to his lips and said, “Stop right there, stay just as you are, please.”

Shaking slightly, he reached over to the side table where he had left his drawing pad and some pencils. Will blushed, “Oh, God, really?”

“That’s even better,” Hannibal exulted, “It was perfect when you looked at me just after saying you loved me. It’s even better now, when you’re feeling self-conscious about my obsessive need to capture you in my drawings.”

“You’ve captured me every other way, so I suppose, why not,” Will groaned, although he remained obediently suspended in time, eyes glowing brightly ocean blue, cheeks pink. The sheets lay gently against his lower body, just barely covering his ass, and he was half-propped by his elbows. Hannibal’s pencil raced over the page, ambitious, chasing after something he could never fully preserve.

“Because it makes you uncomfortable. Because you don’t like the adulation, being put up on a pedestal, considered the highest form of art. Because you love it.” Hannibal’s smile was shy as he put the finishing touches, for now, on his brief sketch. “Thank you for indulging me.”

“Couldn’t you just keep me in your memory palace, forever, and keep this night like that?” Will’s long, dark lashes cast shadows on his face as he glanced at Hannibal’s sketch. He thought he looked like someone else in Hannibal’s deft, talented pencil strokes, a delightedly hedonistic angel.

Could that be him, as well as the frumpy professor or the blood-drenched ravenstag? It was easier to see the ridiculous and the savage in himself than the sexually liberated and handsome. He was still working on that part, believing this wasn’t a fantasy or a trick. Reality felt too much like a dream. He was too far in to wake up.

Hannibal set the book aside and sat up straight against the propped pillows and headboard as Will’s face nestled into his thigh. Restlessly toying with Will’s curls, he said, “There are things in my memory palace that would eat you alive.”

“Bet you used to think quite a bit about eating me.”

“I told myself I should.” Hannibal’s mouth twitched, a tiny expression of the deep emotion no one else had made him feel: regret. Shame at his past actions. It was safe to feel it here, even though it still burned. Admitting he was wrong would never come easy, not even with Will, but he felt at the moment baptized in fire. “It was unpardonably foolish of me to imagine it would ever be that easy for me to let you go. To get you out of my heart. My memories aren’t enough. Drawings aren’t enough, musical compositions...odes to you, mere shadows of what I feel. It frightens me, that it all seems useless. Only this moment with you matters, and the next and the next, but they’re gone as soon as they happen.”

“I’m sorry it hurts so much. But you can let me into every room in your palace, Hannibal.” Will kissed the soft skin on the inside of his thigh and cast him a longing gaze. “I’m not afraid of your ghosts.”

Chapter End Notes

Just the epilogue left! It's going to be a fun one featuring pretty much all of our characters. Hope you enjoyed the update and thanks for reading. 🥰

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

And if I shed a tear, I won't cage it
I won't fear love
Oh, and if I feel a rage, I won't deny it
I won't fear love
-Sarah McLachlan, “Fumbling Towards Ecstasy”

Three Months Later

“It’s a perfect day for a barbecue,” Jack Crawford observed upon one indeed idyllic Sunday afternoon. He gestured with his craft beer bottle at the heavens. “Not a cloud in the sky.”

“There is nothing like a cold beer and some good company on a day like this,” Bella agreed, smiling around at the small group of guests in the backyard of Hannibal and Will’s new home.

“Glad you like the beer. High-end craft brews are the only type Hannibal will allow in the house,” Will snickered.

“Anything less is for cretins absent of a proper palette,” said Hannibal, draping his arm easily around Will’s waist.

He didn’t mention that he used to brew his own beer, but that once he had admitted to starting that habit in service of Alana’s preference of alcoholic beverages, Will made him throw it away, supplies and all, in a fit of jealousy. Then they had angry sex against the kitchen counter. No, it wasn’t a tale fit for mixed company, but from the saucy look Hannibal shot him, Will knew he was enjoying the same memory.

“Well, I’m used to you serving only the best,” Jack nodded, oblivious.

“And as such, Jack, I’m obliged to correct you; this is not a ‘barbecue,’ but a garden party.” Hannibal’s smile was mildly reproving.

Will gazed at his lover, appreciating his adorable snobbery, plus the feeling of Hannibal’s warm, strong arm wound around his back, those long fingers planted possessively at his waist and hip. It was a grounding touch, and it was incredibly intimate. This was a hot day, and Will’s shirt was already clinging slightly to his skin; Hannibal’s behavior was making him feel even hotter in all the right ways.

For the moment, Will was fascinated by the simple perfection of being a couple in front of other people; how safe, wanted and protected it made him feel. Coming into his own as a

murderer and con artist had not alleviated his instinctive dislike of socializing for periods longer than five minutes, but this, today, somehow, was really nice.

“You do have a lovely garden,” Bella enthused, “All those bluebells and daffodils, and my, what are those bright pink flowers? So gorgeous.”

“A close relative of wild blue phlox,” Hannibal explained, because if he used their proper name of Sweet William, Will would turn scarlet and probably slap him. Again, that was behavior best saved for their alone time.

“So let me get this straight,” Brian Zeller put in, hand in hand with Beverly, Jimmy close behind them. “You have beer, corn on the cob, strawberry shortcake, and you’re planning to make burgers and ribs on the grill...but it’s not a barbecue?”

Hannibal blinked with a frozen half-smile. He usually did not deign to acknowledge Mr. Zeller, nor his equally flippant cohort Mr. Price, although Ms. Katz was perfectly acceptable company.

“Actually, that’s a strawberry meringue pie,” Will corrected Brian, his face beaming with pride for his live-in lover, the talented chef.

“It’s a party, we’re in a garden,” Beverly snorted, rolling her eyes. “Get with the times, Zeller.”

“Speaking of gardens,” Jimmy put in, “how the hell did you manage to get those black-eyed susans to grow in so bright and strong? I struggle with those every year.”

Hannibal’s eyes flitted cheerfully over the assortment of blooms, from the bearded foxglove which obviously had its more nefarious uses, to the bergamots which Will had insisted on, because they smelled like Hannibal, spicy-sweet and tempting.

“You’ll have to ask Will, he’s a wonder in the garden. After reading only a few books on the subject, all of a sudden he was coaxing miracles from the soil. But then, he never ceases to amaze me.”

Will blushed and tightened his own arm around Hannibal’s waist, glowing and taking confidence from their closeness.

“And as to the grill, we’d best see to it, hadn’t we, my love?” Hannibal asked.

“Yeah, you show me the ropes, babe.” They nodded to their guests and drifted to their cooking duties.

“No,” Will muttered unprompted as he helped Hannibal brush the ribs with bourbon marinade, “You still can’t kill Zeller. He’s my friend.”

“He’s loud and obnoxious,” Hannibal pouted, glancing up at Will through long blonde lashes like the shameless coquette he was, but two could play at that game. “Think of the fun: we could murder Zeller and Price together, create a dual tableau honoring their close bond.”

“Zeller rooted for us, after we broke up.”

Hannibal looked up more fully, surprised. “Oh?”

“Yes. He was hoping we’d get back together, said we gave him faith in true love. And Price was all for us, too. Matter of fact, he was pretty rude to Caleb at that charity gala.”

“I’ve clearly underestimated them both,” Hannibal allowed, smiling broadly, “They are excellent judges of character.”

Hannibal thought back to that night at the gala, Will on Caleb’s arm and the pain reverberating between himself and Will as they stared at each other from across the room, unable to touch, unable to end the awful, aching distance between them. His face fell slightly.

Will kissed his cheek and murmured, “What?”

“It is nothing...only...” He looked around, obviously wishing everyone else would disappear. “Don’t ever break up with me again. Please.”

It amazed Will how far Hannibal had come. There had been a time when he would have suffered acutely under a vulnerability, a sadness like that and stubbornly concealed it in prideful silence.

“*Hannibal.*” Will kissed him again, on the mouth this time, soft and sweet.

Will wished he had been more successful in finding the perfect engagement ring; what better moment to propose than here, in their new home, among friends and family? But Hannibal had very distinctive tastes, and Will had spent hours scouring antique dealer websites after his boyfriend fell asleep, trying to find the one that was just right. He wished he could give him the ultimate reassurance in this moment, that they were joined for life; Will was never going away again. He had already let quite a few moments like this, intimate and sparkling, slip away because he didn't have the all-important ring, dammit.

They were interrupted by several new arrivals: among them Alana Bloom looking reluctantly impressed by the beautiful house and stunning backyard, and Frederick Chilton, bearing the distinct appearance of a man who truly had no idea why he was there.

“Frederick,” Will crowed, clapping the man on the back when he arrived carrying a large watermelon and looking distinctly suspicious of the entire affair. Some people are just born suspicious, Will mused, and others, like Dr. Chilton, just had good common sense. “So glad you could make it.”

Across the lawn, Jack looked at Bella, Beverly, Zeller and Price in amazement.

“Did you all ever think you would see Will Graham looking this comfortable in a social setting? As *co-host*?” Jack asked.

There was Will, making congenial small talk with an easy grin, decked out in a robin’s egg blue polo shirt and a pair of khaki shorts, almost as if Hannibal had dressed him according to

his own tastes, but suddenly the cheerful attire couldn't have seemed more appropriate. Will looked like the unrealistically good-looking, kind-hearted dad on anyone's favorite sitcom.

"It's amazing what a great relationship can do to help you feel centered," Bella suggested with a fond smile at her husband.

"It's even more amazing what some really good and very consistent *sex* can do," Beverly interjected with a smirk. Everyone stared at her in momentary silence.

"I...brought a watermelon," Chilton said curtly, almost shoving the fruit into Will's hands. He glanced at the grill with another gust of instinctual wisdom and asked, "I'm assuming you have some vegetarian fare on offer?"

"Of course; there's fire-grilled veggies coming up soon." Will gestured with a false smile of encouragement. "Relax, Frederick, we invited you because you're our friend."

"Yes, well." Frederick adjusted the collar of his short-sleeved gingham shirt as if the material was stifling. "Forgive me if I find your sudden camaraderie a touch bizarre, after the arguments we've had recently."

"Oh, you mean regarding the way you run things at the BSHCI?" Will could feel Hannibal watching him, calmly cooking at the grill, not feeling the need to interpose into the conversation; he was just enjoying one of his favorite sights: Will Graham, at his manipulative best.

"Really, Frederick, it's water under the bridge. I'm sure you took my notes quite seriously, didn't you, after what my good friend Georgia Madchen revealed to me. You'll alter the course of her treatment to something less aggressive, won't you?"

"Every choice that I make regarding my patients' treatment is strictly above board and highly individualized to their personal needs," Frederick retorted pridefully.

"You tailor their treatment directly to your own needs of publicly peacocking your supposed 'success stories' in getting through to the deranged, but Georgia Madchen is a perfectly sane, highly intelligent and kind young woman recovering slowly from an illness and an ordeal. As you might imagine, I can empathize. Ever do that, Frederick, ever empathize?"

Chilton chortled snidely. "Well, not so much that empathy takes over my entire personality and I lose sight of my professional objectives. It's not in the patients' best interest that I throw all prudent methodology to the wind in favor of making them --" he added condescending air quotes. "--'feel better'. That kind of success has no longevity to it; I'm trying to effect real, positive, and lifelong change for these people. I understand that this is far beyond the sphere of your world view, Mr. Graham, so I will forgive your consistent and borderline invasive objections."

Will's smile deepened, and it was eerie, but that was nothing compared to the brutal montage of homicidal ideas cascading through his mind as he calmly watched Frederick's smug face. That would be fun, but watching Chilton wither behind bars in the place he'd ruled with such ruthless greed sounded even more delicious. Chilton's behavior was infuriating, and

something obviously had to be done to get the BSHCI into more trustworthy hands. This conversation merely served as a final confirmation that Will approved of Hannibal's plan to frame Chilton for the Ripper murders.

They had plans, Will, Hannibal and Abigail, for a European tour. Since Jack and the team had been verging a little too close for comfort, so that it was a matter of slight exhaustion to Will to hold them off from discerning the Ripper's true identity, they might as well take this opportunity to shuck off their lives here, at least temporarily. Within the next few days, it would all be over; they would release Miriam Lass and let the dominoes fall.

Will would be on a plane to Paris with his boyfriend and daughter soon after, tossing the dreary and tiresome parts of his life here aside along with Jack Crawford and the FBI powers-that-be. Someone appropriate would replace Chilton, maybe Alana, if Hannibal exerted his influence with his usual expert skill, making whoever was in charge of that decision think they came up with the idea on their own. Will would send Beverly postcards from France, from Florence and Venice, from the greenest hills of Ireland and the highest pure white cliffs of Greece where the sea shone like sapphire glass.

"Oh, I never meant to impose," Will put a hand on his heart with a patronizing sigh of faux-regret. "I hope you'll forgive my unsolicited advice, Frederick."

"I…" Frederick shot him an extremely weirded-out look, and Will had to fight the urge to break out into loud laughter at the sight.

"Make yourself at home, there's beer in the cooler just there." Will nodded at the melon. "I'm going to take this inside and slice it up."

He found Bedelia Du Maurier alone in the kitchen; well, alone except for the open bottle of sauvignon blanc and the glass in her hand.

"Dr. Du Maurier, are you feeling shy today?" Will inquired as he started cutting up the watermelon.

"I'm a solitary person, and times of reflection are often those in which I find the most peace." She set her glass down, casting him a weary half-smile containing a fair share of irony. "I cannot help but wonder why you invited me here. It would not be appropriate for us to socialize outside of session."

"I brought you here to say 'thank you,' Doctor. Genuinely," he added, and this part was true, "You helped keep me together during months when I couldn't have done that alone. You kept me on the path."

"The path of self-discovery?" She asked, refilling her glass with a slight tremor in her hand, although she did not spill a drop. "Or the path back to Hannibal Lecter?"

"They're one and the same, but you knew that." He popped a piece of fruit into his mouth. "Watermelon?" he added.

She shook her head, looking so tiny and fragile in her white sheath dress. "No, thank you."

“You really put your all into my therapy, I mean you brought your A game. Why was that? I know you don’t put that kind of effort in for just anybody; you’re retired.”

“I realized that it was in my best interest to keep you on the path,” she admitted, shivering and taking a gulp of wine. “Hannibal has never been happier, and I haven’t felt quite so safe in years.”

“Did he *threaten* you?” Will asked, washing the sticky watermelon juice from his hands, then casually lifting the plate of fruit so he could bring it back outside.

“He’s Hannibal.” Bedelia glared at him, just for a moment, but it was infinitely satisfying to Will that he had managed to make her impeccable facade wobble. “He didn’t have to threaten me. I simply knew.”

“Hmm,” Will murmured cheerfully. He’d always wondered about the terms of their arrangement. It sent a shimmer of pleasure down his spine, knowing that Hannibal had been that desperate to keep him in his clutches. He couldn’t really focus on Bedelia anymore, but she was still looking at him with a slight grimace.

“Your smiles used to be so rare.” Finishing her glass and pouring another to go, she added, “Now everytime you smile, I really wish you wouldn’t.”

Obviously preferring her chances with the company outside, she slipped away into the yard.

Alana had taken in the sights at the party with cautious reserve, but eventually she felt like she ought to say something to Will. She found him alone a little while later, setting out some silverware, napkins, and homemade vanilla bean ice cream to accompany the gorgeous strawberry pie.

“Hi, Will.”

Oh, Alana. Always earnest, so well-meaning and above reproach.

Inside, Will was rolling his eyes all the way to the back of his head, but he let her just do her thing.

“So, where’s Abigail? I was sure she would be here today.”

“She's teaching a knitting class at the library,” Will explained. “She’s coming by afterwards, with some of her homemade cookies. Save room.”

“Hmm. I have to say, I’m impressed with everything you and Hannibal have built here,” she allowed.

Will glanced up, his brows lifting. “Oh? As I live and breathe.”

“You don’t have to be a bastard about it,” she laughed, oblivious to what an absurdly underestimating statement that was. He currently *lived* to be a petty bastard. Well, among

other things, of course.

She flipped her silky dark hair over her shoulder and pursed her pretty lips, a sight he once would have swooned over. Now, he couldn't even remember how that felt.

"I was worried," she continued, "First, you were Hannibal's patient, and then so quickly you were a couple, and then you were practically adopting Abigail when she was still grieving--"

Will groaned good-naturedly. "Here we go."

"I mean, for God's sake, Will, she calls you and Hannibal her *fathers*."

"That's probably because we're her fathers," Will mused, his eyes listlessly darting over the assembled guests, mentally logging who might need a drink refill and counting up the number of requests for pie, with or without ice cream. This conversation was already so boring.

"You're so goddamed *confident*, and haughty, and smug. What happened to you, Will Graham?" She set her hands on her hips, her lilac sundress blowing gently in the warm breeze.

"I thought you came over here to tell me you were impressed."

"The entire thing is very impressive. You and Hannibal are blissful here. The house is lovely. I've never seen that many enormous dog beds in the same room with a harpsichord, by the way."

"The dogs like to listen to Hannibal play." Will grinned, this time a real one, his face lighting up, blue eyes glowing. "We all do. They know not to get too close."

"Abigail is well-adjusted, stable, excelling in her courses. She goes to her therapy and when she's around the two of you, it's obvious she's entirely comfortable and feels at home. I don't know how you pulled it off. It has evolved now to the point where I look crazy if I try to object to any of it."

"We wouldn't want you to look *crazy*, now would we, Alana?" Will tsked as he cut himself a slice of the strawberry pie. "We all know how you feel about instability. Might be too much for you to handle. Pie?"

"Smug," Alana complained, reaching a hand out for the plate of scrumptious, fluffy meringue pie. "Bastard." She took a bite. "Oh, my God."

"Jeeesus," Will sighed as he enjoyed the first taste of tart fruit and meringue so light it was a cloud on his tongue. "If you'll excuse me, I really must pay my compliments to the chef."

He was under no illusion that Alana wasn't going to keep an eye on them, but that was fine. She had dubbed herself Abigail's angelic savior since the first day she visited the girl in the hospital, yet frowned upon Hannibal and Will for caring in a more genuine way. They weren't going to be hanging around here much longer anyway. In the meantime, as long as

she didn't get too close or too rude about it, the matter of Alana's suspicion that their family arrangement was unhealthy was no more than a faint amusement.

If she only knew how twisted life could be on the way to getting healthy.

***

"Are you kidding me with the pie?" Will accused, stealing a moment to mischievously chase Hannibal into the kitchen.

Hannibal glanced at him in amusement as he placed several dishes in the sink. "I hoped you would like it."

"You can be more direct about it if you want." Will's eyes twinkled as he slinked nearer and caged Hannibal against the sink.

"I made it just for you. I can't help myself...whenever I cook or bake, I try to imagine what would please you. I think of my food in your mouth, slipping past your naughty lips…" Hannibal traced Will's lips and carefully brushed his groin against Will's, both of them sighing at the growing hardness. "Melting on your tongue, gliding down your throat. I want what I feed you to be so delicious that you can't stop moaning over every morsel."

Hannibal had on a slim-fitting blue linen shirt with a white pattern of hibiscus flowers, which, along with his dark green shorts and what he referred to as his "summer loafers," should have looked ridiculous. But he looked like a perfect, sophisticated model, someone who ought to be posing majestically on a yacht. The sun blinked in through the window, slipping lovingly over Hannibal's hair so that the silver and blonde gleamed; his eyes were warm and always curious, always pushing Will, *always*.

"Mine," Will said softly, pressing a hand to Hannibal's chest and staring intently into his eyes, "All mine."

"Yes," Hannibal whispered into their kiss, taking Will's lips slowly, tracing them with his tongue before licking deep into his mouth for a thorough and languid exploration, sucking Will's tongue. His hands were firm on Will's hips, tracing the bones, digging his thumbs into delicate, recently bruised skin to reassert ownership, and Will tugged his hair, hard.

"What do you want to put in my mouth, right now?" The words were raunchy and playful, but Will was panting with need, his taste buds watering.

Hannibal growled, pushing Will into the study. He locked the door, then pressed a big palm to Will's head to drive him to his knees. With wanton, angelic eyes, Will unzipped Hannibal's shorts and eased them down, then licked his lips in eager anticipation. Hannibal's beautifully thick cock stood at rigid attention, and Hannibal was quivering in urgent desire.

“All for me?” Will smiled. “I guess you’d better be quiet, Hannibal, no matter how this makes you feel. We don’t want any of our guests to overhear.”

He leaned in and licked gradually up Hannibal’s hard length, keeping eye contact as he played with his balls and then swirled his tongue around the tip, savoring the precum. Finally snapping, Hannibal grabbed his head and fucked desperately into his mouth, letting out a series of feral, low grunts. Will could only imagine how Hannibal’s heart must be pounding because his own was thundering through his ears as his veins sang with delight. He loved the way Hannibal handled him, with roughness that, in its loss of control, was more tender than the softest touch could ever be.

“Bad boy,” Hannibal said raggedly when it was over and Will was swiping up a spare drop of cum to suck off of his thumb. “Atrocious behavior. You couldn’t wait for the party to be over. At some point...”

Hannibal took a few more heated breaths as he tried to compose himself, zipping his shorts back up and running a hand through his disheveled hair.

“At some point we shall have to have a serious discussion about your exhibitionist streak.”

“And my raging libido. It’s so *inappropriate*. I’m sorry. Will you make me so sorry later, baby?” Will spoke gently, carefully playing Hannibal’s game, giving him all the ammunition he needed to be absolutely filthy towards him once they could be alone again.

Hannibal yanked Will’s hair to urge him back up to his feet. When they were face to face, he answered, “You’re going to be very, very sorry, Will. I’ll make you cry..”

“Promise?”

***

The party was over and they were cleaning up the yard, clearing away the empty plates and bottles, then folding the chairs and returning them to the shed.

Will lingered in the moonlight and stared up at the sky when they were done. Hannibal stood behind him, arms wrapped around his middle, face tucked into his neck.

“What are you thinking about, mylimasis?”

“I’m thinking I’d like to keep this place, this house.” He turned to kiss Hannibal briefly, tenderly. “Our house. We might like to come back someday. I know I would.”

“If we can, I should like it, too. We’ve made so many memories here that my palace is gleaming with the light of them.”

“Give me some more memories?” Will smiled, leading Hannibal inside, through the beautifully expanded kitchen, past the study with its ponderous artwork on the walls, its impressive bookshelf, regal harpsichord, and dog pillows.

They had boarded the dogs for the party, and they had the whole, quiet house to themselves for the night. Will suddenly wanted Hannibal to make love to him in every single room, and he realized he was saying goodbye to this place, just for now. So many more adventures lay ahead, but the path to Hannibal always led back home.

He walked upstairs backwards, slowly lingering and teasing Hannibal with his feisty gaze. “You know, before summer came, I never really thought about you wearing shorts.”

“It would be utterly intolerable to pass so hot a season wearing full trousers every day. Even I must make concessions to the weather.”

“I really like the way you look in those shorts, Hannibal.”

It was a bit of an understatement. Will couldn’t quite decide which aspect he liked best: being able to see so much of Hannibal’s legs during the day, or the way the shorts accentuated Hannibal’s ass.

“Well, then I shall consider it a happy concession.” Hannibal blushed slightly, reaching the step below Will and running one finger down the front of his shirt. “As for your attire, the items I chose for you look absolutely charming.”

“I guess you probably think you’ll be able to convince me to accept the ‘trousseau’ of clothes you’ve commissioned for me, for Europe.”

“I think that you’re going to be a good boy and come into the bedroom with me.” Hannibal walked past him, his eyes burning in the shadowy hallway. “We have much to discuss.”

“Like what?” Will asked, turning a lamp on because he wanted to see Hannibal, wanted to watch his face shifting expressions of fear, longing, arousal and wildness, wanted to watch his body moving above him, driving into his own, pulling Will apart at the seams.

“This,” Hannibal smiled, pulling Will’s shirt over his head and dropping it to the floor. He caressed Will’s body like it was the first time, with desperate craving and fervent obsession.

Will moaned as Hannibal’s fingertips coasted over his shoulder blades, down the hard curves of muscle in his arms and across his chest, teasing his nipples, drifting down his belly where his breath caught, helpless, pinned in place by Hannibal’s gaze.

“And this,” he said huskily, unbuttoning Will’s shorts and pushing them off, slowly massaging his ass, laying a softly wet kiss on his upturned mouth, tasting Will’s invitation to kiss him forever, steal all his breath and every tomorrow he had to give.

“This,” Hannibal added, biting Will’s neck and cupping his erection through his underwear, making him whimper, fingers digging into Hannibal's shirt and twisting. “Lie down for me, beloved. It’s going to be a long night.”

“I thought you were planning to punish me tonight, and be rough about it,” Will ventured tremulously, staring up at him as he lay on his back and Hannibal hovered over him, stroking his face, letting Will’s stubble prickle at his fingers.

“Yes, I am, in due time. You’ll like that, won’t you?”

“Very much,” Will whispered.

“My good boy. First, I want to make love to you.” He kissed Will again and again, until Will was dizzy with it, hungry for more, a floating sensation taking over his body. Hannibal always knew what he needed.

“Hey,” Will sighed, catching Hannibal by the shirt collar and smiling, slightly dazed. His lips were swollen, eyes lust-blown and enamored.

Hannibal looked down at him expectantly.

“Hi,” Will said, running his fingers under Hannibal’s shirt, pushing it up to feel more and more of his hot, smooth skin, the strength of his back, the way Will’s touch made his breathing grow hectic.

Their eyes locked and Hannibal smiled again, warmly. “Hello, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much to everyone who read, commented and left kudos! Hope you enjoyed the last chapter 🥰

A couple of quick last notes: I left some hints, just for fun, throughout the story which can suggest (if you like) that this AU is the same one Hannibal dreamed about in my fic, "A Dream of Christmas" (or just slightly adjacent to it in the Hannigram AU multiverse).

I have some more ideas for continuing the storyline, which is why I left a few issues unresolved. There's also a couple of things that happened between chapters which I'd like to visit in more detail. 😉

I'll be back with more Hannigram soon, thanks again ❤️

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!